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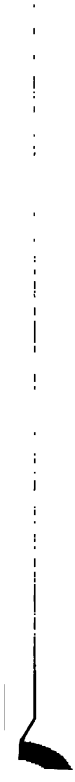

Harold's Tower. Front.

MAX FRERE;

OR.

OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.

BY

MISS PINCHARD,

AUTHOR OF "LILIAS," ETC. ETC.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS,
THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE;
NEW YORK: 416, BROOME STREET.
1867.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE PLAYROOM AT MERTON LODGE ...	1
II.	THE FIRST TROUT	9
III.	TEMPTATION AND A FALL	18
IV.	FAIRY-LAND	26
V.	HELP FOR MAGGIE.....	32
VI.	ONE FALSE STEP LEADS TO ANOTHER	38
VII.	MAGGIE MAKES EFFORTS	49
VIII.	HUGH IN TROUBLE.....	57
IX.	THE MISSING HALF-CROWN.....	64
X.	MAGGIE AND HER MOTHER	69
XI.	DISCOVERY	77
XII.	MAX'S MISTAKE	85
XIII.	THE BROTHERS	93
XIV.	THE LITTLE REFORMERS.....	100
XV.	HUGH'S ESCAPE	107
XVI.	THE FAMILY COUNCIL.....	115
XVII.	HUGH'S SECRET	125
XVIII.	*A BUSY TIME*	132

Harold's Tower.

Front.

enough. She did not say how long I was to play," replied Pen.

"And I suppose you cut the matter rather short," said Max, laughing.

"But, Miss Penelope, you know you should not have hid your book when you heard your sister coming," said Nurse; "that looks as if you were not quite satisfied that 'twas all right, Miss."

"Why, Nurse, I always do," replied Pen. "I get so frightened when I hear her coming, for something is sure to make her angry, and then I pop away what I am doing, and she pulls it out, and says I'm sly and naughty," replied the child.

"But why do you get so frightened?" said Hugh; "she is but a girl, and I would not mind, if I were you."

"But I *do* mind, Hugh. I should not much care for *her;* but then she goes and tells mamma, and I get punished," answered Penelope.

"No, no, Penly," said Max; "you don't often get punished for what Rachel says. Mamma pretty well knows now what a tempest Rachel is, and she does not punish without being tolerably sure of what she is about."

"No, Max; I know that," responded the weeping child; "but the worst of it is that Rachel scolds, and hurries, and questions me so, that she makes me really naughty. I either get frightened, and say what is not quite true, or else get into a passion, so that I deserve to be punished; but I should not be naughty half so often if it were not for her. And the same about my lessons: I am always in disgrace when she keeps school."

"Well!" exclaimed little Helen, a sprightly

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had been too long indulged, for her to yield to the claims of another, and she often sorely tried the patience of her kind little sister, and was frequently the means of getting her into disgrace by sending her on some needless errand, when she should have been learning her lessons; and even when the school-bell had rung, and she ought to have obeyed its summons, Margaret would keep her to read a little more, or fetch something for her, though she knew how angry the least delay in obeying its summons made Rachel.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST TROUT.

AFTER leaving the playroom, Max and Hugh started at a brisk pace on their expedition. On the bridge they met their cousin, John Orwell, and the three boys proceeded to some meadows about a mile below the town, where they proposed to begin their sport.

Max was the proud owner of an excellent rod and book of flies, and all proper gear, and was now for the first time going to try his hand at trout-fishing. The other boys had less dignified apparatus, and aspired to nothing beyond ground bait, and the capture therewith of roach, dace, and gudgeon.

"I say, Max," exclaimed John Orwell, as his cousin took a splendid specimen of fly from his book, and attaching it to the line, prepared for his first throw; "what I would give for a rod like yours! Do you know how much it cost?"

"No," replied Max; "Uncle Hugh gave it me. It's a capital one, I have no doubt, for he's a first-rate hand at fishing."

"Did he give you the flies and all?" asked John.

"Yes, the rod, and flies, and basket, too," re-

plied Max, opening the basket that he had slung at his back, and displaying its beauties with no small exultation.

"Well, uncle Hugh is a brick, and no mistake," said John. "I wish he were as kind to me as he is to you! He knows how much I have been longing for a rod, and it's very hard that he should give one to you, and not to me, when you are only half a year older than I am!"

"You must make uncle Hugh as well pleased with you as he is with Max, John, and then I dare say you'll get a rod too. You know Max earned his by work!" said Hugh, proud of his elder brother's good deeds.

"Why, how was that?" asked John.

"Oh, never mind, Hugh; where's the good of telling that?" said Max, who never liked Hugh to boast of him. "Come, boys, we are wasting all our time. Let us go over to that bend of the river where there are no trees. I shall get my line entangled if I throw here."

"And we will stay here, John," said Hugh; "this is a capital place; they say that there are lots of dace here!"

"You can try your hand with your stupid old rod and worm," said John, crossly; "I have no pleasure in such childish stuff; I shall go and see Max fish."

"Come along then, Jack," said Max. "I wish you had a rod, old boy; but you shall try a cast with mine presently, if you like;" and so saying, Max and John walked off together, leaving Hugh to make what havoc he might amongst the small fry of the river.

The boys had pursued their sport some time, Max and John using the new rod in turn, but, alas! with but little success; for Max, attracted by its glitter, had selected a fly wholly unsuited for that river, as well as for the season of the year; and as neither boy had any idea of the management of a fly-line, they of course continued to lash the water without attaining even so much as a nibble.

Hugh, meantime, with his less aspiring tackle, was hooking dace and gudgeon in respectable numbers. They were not very large, it is true, and probably an older sportsman would have returned the greater part of them to the water; but Hugh was well pleased and somewhat proud of his superior success.

John now joined him, and, unpacking his own rod, baited a hook and began fishing. In a few minutes he too had landed a fair-sized dace, and was again throwing in his line, when Max, not a little discomfited by his failure, proposed pushing on down the river, and trying another part about a mile farther from the town, where he had heard that some fine trout had been caught.

"I promised poor Maggie to give her the first trout that was caught with my new rod," he said; "but there does not seem much likelihood that she will get it to-night, if we stay here."

Hugh, who was accustomed to yield his own wishes, if they interfered with those of another, began to draw in his line; but John answered roughly,

"Nonsense, Max; I shall not stir, and don't you, Hugh. We have good sport here, and you

can take yourself and your grand new rod off whenever you like; but I shall stay here. *Trout*, indeed! You'll catch as many salmon as trout, I fancy, with that absurd rod and line. I can't think how uncle Hugh could give you such a stupid thing."

"The rod is a beauty, Jack, and the tackle's all as nice as it can be," replied Max, a little angrily, for it was more than he could bear with patience to have his treasured gift and the beloved giver attacked thus. "Uncle Hugh chose it at one of the best fishing-tackle shops in London, and, of course, he must know what is good."

"The rod may not be bad," answered John, with a sneer; "but with a buzz-fly at one end and a blockhead at the other, there's little danger for the trout."

Max was somewhat nettled at this rude speech. He was a thoroughly good-tempered lad, but John Orwell's disagreeable manner annoyed him, and winding up his line, he walked away without vouchsafing any reply.

"Now then, old fellow," said John to his young companion, "now that the Emperor's gone, you and I will have some good sport;" and, sticking his rod up in the ground, with the line floating, he threw himself down under a tree, and began singing a comic song, not of the most refined description.

"I sha'n't stay long, John," said Hugh. "Papa does not like us to separate when we are out fishing, and he would be displeased with Max for walking off and leaving me behind. If he chooses to go, I must go too."

"Oh, certainly," replied John, "good little boy. How long have you been such a pattern of obedience?"

Hugh coloured, but did not reply. The fact was, that in the previous autumn Hugh, yielding to John's persuasions, had got into rather a serious scrape, and had then been forbidden by his father to go away from his brother, or join any other companion apart from him.

Mr. Frere would have preferred that his boys should not have had John Orwell as their associate, for he was by no means such a companion as was desirable for them; but as he was their cousin, and was only at Otterford during the holiday seasons, he did not like altogether to forbid their being together, and as he had the fullest reliance on his eldest boy, he still ventured to allow them to walk and fish together, only under the condition that the brothers should not separate from each other. Max had not gone far when his father's injunction occurred to his mind, and immediately he turned, and came back to the place where the two sat.

"Won't you come, Hugh?" he asked, when he came near enough to be heard. "I have no doubt that you would find plenty of sport at Fordham Bend, and then I might have a chance of some too."

"Yes, I'll come, Max," replied Hugh, springing up. "Come along, John; 'tis but fair to give the Emperor a chance." Max was often called the Emperor, in allusion to his imperial name.

"Emperor! You may well call him so," replied John, "for such an autocrat I never saw, nor such a selfish fellow."

"That he is not, John," replied Hugh; "he's

not in the least selfish, and he's a better fellow by half than you!" he added, in his zeal for his brother's honour; for Hugh felt that Max could do no wrong; in his eyes he was perfect.

A shout of contemptuous laughter was John's only answer to Hugh's burst of enthusiasm, and then they joined Max; all three boys walked on in silence towards Fordham Bend.

It was a lovely afternoon, and as the young fishermen walked onwards together, the cloud that had for a moment overcast Max's good-humour vanished, and they all became as merry and frolicksome as boys should be when out of school, and began to expend their overflowing spirit in all sorts of gambols and feats of agility.

"I'll bet you sixpence that you don't clear that brook, Max," said John.

"I won't bet about it, but I'll try the leap, if you'll follow me," replied Max.

"Well, then, I'm your man," answered John. "We'll have a run of twenty yards."

"Very well," replied Max; and having paced their distance, Max set out on his run, and with an active bound cleared the brook, and stood waving his hand in triumph on the opposite side.

John then took his run, and leapt the brook, but fell as he touched the ground, and slipping back, both legs went into the water, and he rose not a little disconcerted at his failure, and disposed to be very angry with his cousins for the merry laugh with which they witnessed the catastrophe.

"Just try it again, and see if I do not do it as well as you!" exclaimed he, angrily.

"With all my heart," said Max; "I dare say

you will; but even if you do not, you must bear in mind that I am half a year older, and a little taller and stronger than you, so that I have an advantage; but let us try again. Shall we take it from this side to get back to our path, or cross over down there, and leap again from the same place?"

John chose the latter proposition, and, crossing at a narrow part of the brook, they again took their station, and made the leap. This time both boys reached the ground safely, but Max stood at least two feet farther from the water's edge than John, as well as alighted with more firmness and elasticity.

"Max did it best," said Hugh, pleased at his brother's success, and unmindful of John's look of annoyance. "Few can beat the Emperor," he added, as he hitched himself fondly on to his brother's arm, both boys having now recrossed the stream, and resumed their walk.

But the cheerfulness of the little party was gone. John became sullen, and Max feeling that his cousin was unjust in being put out of temper by his having excelled him in a leap to which he had himself challenged him, was silent and indisposed to try to conciliate.

In this mood they reached Fordham Bend, and, choosing their ground, the two Freres had soon unpacked their rods, and begun to fish; but Max, as before, without success, though the fish were rising all round him; whilst Hugh, a little lower down the stream, was delightedly capturing one little fish after another as fast as he could desire. John, meanwhile, lay listlessly on the bank watching Max, but not speaking to either cousin.

At last Max, who was a very kind-hearted lad, and was always uncomfortable when at variance with any of his companions, exclaimed—

"Come, old fellow, don't be so glum. Come over here, and try a cast with my rod. There's no saying whether you may not hook one of those fine speckled fellows that seem disposed to bite at every fly but mine."

John, who was only waiting for Max to make the first advance, now rose from the ground, but with a manner as if he were doing Max a great favour, and came to where he stood.

"Very well," he said, "I'll try; but I should like to put on another fly;" and selecting a small red hackle from his cousin's book, he affixed it to the line, and, moving a little farther up the stream, began dapping, with certainly more skill than Max had displayed, and presently an undoubted nibble was vouchsafed him. Both boys were in an agony of expectation and delight as the fish, which had now taken firm hold of the hook, began to dart about, making it very difficult to the inexperienced young fisherman to keep his rod and line from being twitched out of his hands. However, in spite of his lack of skill and habit, John, with Max's help, succeeded in landing his fish—a fine trout of about half a pound weight, and as beautiful a fish as boy could desire to see.

The first trout caught with the new tackle, and poor Max not the catcher! He was half disposed to be cross about it; but the inclination lasted only for a moment, and was manfully put down; so that all three boys rejoiced and exulted together over John's wonderful success, and in admiration of the

brilliant gold and silver and scarlet that spangled the side of the beautiful trout.

"And Maggie will have her trout at last," said Hugh; "how pleased she will be."

"Indeed, Maggie will not have this one," said John; "I caught it, and I shall have it."

"Oh, no, John," exclaimed Max, "that is not fair. I told you from the first that I had promised little Mag that the first fish caught with the new rod should be hers, and you surely would not disappoint the sick child! I do not care a straw for the fish except for her sake; and if we either of us catch another, you shall be welcome to it, but Maggie *must* have this."

"She certainly will not, then," replied John. "It is my fish, for I caught it; and if it had not been for me, it would have been safe enough in there with all its brothers and sisters," and he threw a pebble into the stream to indicate where he meant. "So now that is settled, and we may as well try for another;" and, as he spoke, he took up the rod, and was preparing for another throw, when Max, now thoroughly nettled, took it from him, saying in an angry tone, "No, I thank you, I am not going to let you have my rod all the evening," and, taking possession of it, he walked proudly away, and began to fish a little higher up the stream, Hugh following him, whilst John, who had thrown himself on the grass, and taken the trout into his hand, amused himself by examining and admiring his captive.

CHAPTER III.

TEMPTATION AND A FALL.

HALF an hour passed thus, and Max's anger had vanished. He had continued for some time to fish with the fly that John had selected and found so successful; but though he had had one or two bites, he had not taken any fish. He now bethought him of trying a different specimen, and, seating himself, he selected a "governor," and began to tie it on. The boys had now been out for some hours, and began to get hungry.

"I say, Max, are not you hungry?" said Hugh, leaving his fishing, and coming towards his brother. "I am fairly starving. I wish we had some bread and cheese."

"So do I," replied his brother; "but it is of no use to wish,—we must wait till we get home."

"Suppose we go," suggested Hugh.

"Oh, no! not yet," replied Max, who had just thrown in his line; "I have great hopes that I shall yet catch a fish. I don't like to go home and have it said that Jack killed a fine fish and I caught none. Besides, Maggie will be so much disappointed if she does not get her trout; and though she cannot have the first, she shall the second—I'll take care of that. Now, don't talk, there's a good *fellow—you'll* only frighten the fish."

For a little while Hugh sat on the bank in silence; then he rose, and walked back to the place at which he had left his own rod and fish, and where John, who had tired of his solitude, had begun to try for some more dace and gudgeon.

"Jack, arn't you hungry?" asked Hugh. "I am so hungry that I could almost eat the fish raw. Could not we light a fire and cook some?"

"Make a fire—nonsense!" responded John. "I should like to know what with, and how we should light it. I'm hungry enough too; and if you'll come along with me, we'll soon find something to eat;" and, as he spoke, he threw his rod on the ground, and, seizing Hugh by the arm, led him away across the meadow.

Hugh asked where he was going, but got no answer; and being really much in want of food, followed where he was led.

At the end of the meadow they entered a lane, which led them to a common, at the side of which stood a small public-house called "The Angler's Rest." On a bench in front of the house sat two or three men drinking, and towards a porch on the side nearest to them John now proceeded.

"Oh, John," exclaimed Hugh, "that won't do at all! I cannot go there."

"And why not, I should like to know?" asked his companion.

"Why, papa has forbidden us ever to go to such places. He won't let even Max go, and still less me," replied Hugh.

"Stuff," replied John. "Papa would make a pair of regular milksops of you. But Nursy is not here to see whether her dear little boy goes in and gets a bit of bread and cheese or not, nor Mister

Max either; and so come along and don't make a fool of yourself."

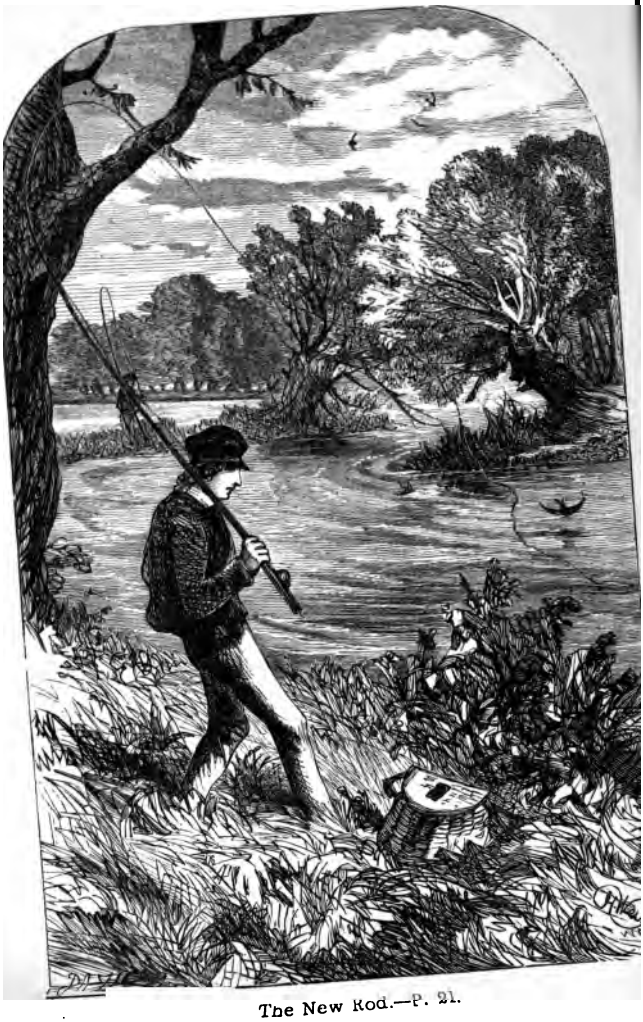
"I really must not, John," replied Hugh. "Papa would be very angry; and, besides, I have no money, so I can't."

"But I have," answered John, "and I'll treat you; so no more nonsense. Papa will never know, and if he did, he would only say it was a reasonable thing for a boy so hungry as you are to eat some bread and cheese when it was offered to him for nothing."

Poor Hugh made a few more attempts at refusal, but they were very feeble; and even whilst speaking he allowed his cousin to push him into the house; and soon the two boys were seated at the table in the little inn parlour, busily engaged in eating bread and cheese, and drinking ale, both more in quantity and of a stronger quality than Hugh was used to take; for John had told the host to bring his best; and that best was of a strong and heady kind.

Then John proposed a cigar, and drawing some from his pocket, together with some matches, insisted on teaching Hugh to smoke. To this, however, Hugh would not consent, as his father had exacted a promise from both his sons that they would never attempt it; and John, therefore, though ridiculing Hugh and his absurd scruples, began to smoke by himself, and soon the little room was full of the fumes of tobacco, much to Hugh's annoyance.

Max was meanwhile so deeply engaged in his fishing that it was long before he noticed the absence of his companions, and when he did, he was *not uneasy, as he* concluded that they had gone a little



The New Rod.—P. 21.

lower down the river, where was a bend that would take them out of sight from the spot where he stood. He therefore continued to follow his sport, only from time to time glancing towards the spot where some of his brother's fishing tackle lay, until at last the delight of a heavy pull on his line, followed by the successful landing of a fine trout, not quite so large as that which John had killed, but still a good-sized fish, entirely engaged his attention.

He shouted aloud for Hugh and John to come and witness his success; but as they neither answered nor came, he supposed that they had wandered too far off to be within hearing, and unhooking his fish, he threw it into his basket and proceeded to try for another. But his labour was in vain, for the fish did not now even nibble; and so, after another half-hour of unsuccessful effort, Max packed up his rod, and walked on towards the part of the river at which he expected to find his companions.

When, after walking some way he saw nothing of them, and remembered that he had seen a part, at least, of Hugh's fishing apparatus lying by the river-side, a throb of fear lest some accident should have happened caused all the blood in his body to flow with painful rapidity; but this fear was soon put aside by the remembrance that it was not probable both boys should have fallen into the water, or met with any other severe accident without his having heard anything to alarm him. Another and more reasonable fear now arose to his mind. He knew John's disobedient and unsteady habits, and he felt sure that he had induced Hugh to leave the river-side, and very likely had led him into some mischief *or misdemeanour*. He was confirmed in this view

by a countryman whom he met, and who told him, in reply to his inquiries whether he had seen anything of two young gentlemen, that he had met two such as Max described about an hour before, and that they were going down the lane towards the common in the direction of "The Angler's Rest."

Exceedingly vexed, both with himself for having failed in duty by forgetting to watch over his brother, and with Hugh and John for their conduct, Max gathered up the articles that the other boys had left on the bank, and, with hasty steps, took the way towards the little inn, where he both hoped and feared he should find the delinquents. He made his way straight to the house, and knocking, inquired whether there were "two young gentlemen there?"

"Yes, sir," replied the landlady, "they are in the parlour. Will you please to walk in?"

Max declined doing so, but begged she would tell them that they must come directly, for it was getting late, and they must make haste home.

John, however, sent a message in return, that they were not coming yet, and that he had better come in and have some bread and cheese with them. Max again refused, and then John himself appeared, and entreated him to come, and tried to pull him in; though—as Max was the elder, and bigger boy, and was not willing to come in—it was, of course, without success. His loud laughing and rough behaviour, however, made such a noise that Hugh—who had hitherto been kept back, partly by John's telling him not to come out, and partly by shame at being found where he was—now appeared, and Max, on seeing him, pushed John forcibly away, and laying hold of Hugh drew him out of the

house, and begging the landlady to fetch his cap and basket that he had left within, he took him by the arm and led him away.

John was in a towering passion; for he had set his mind on getting Max to come into the inn, in disobedience to Mr. Frere's known commands, thinking that if he could once get him to come in, and share in the feast, he should have him in his power, and be able to bind him to secrecy.

The two brothers now walked with hasty steps towards home.

"How could you do so, Hugh?" said Max. "How angry papa will be, and with good reason! You know he has strictly forbidden our ever going into a public-house on any pretence whatever."

"I know that very well," replied Hugh, in a cross tone; "but it's your own fault. I was not going to starve because my lord the Emperor chose to keep on fishing for ever!"

"I wish I had gone when you asked me," replied Max. "I know it is my way to be so taken up with things that I don't know when to leave off—and very wrong it is; but I don't suppose papa will receive that as an excuse. It would have been better to bear being hungry a little longer, than to have got into such a scrape; and if you had but asked me again, and said you really wished to go home, I dare say I should have gone."

"And I dare say not. Jack says rightly that you are a selfish fellow, and want to be taken down," replied Hugh, in an angry manner; and suddenly turning on his brother, he struck him violently.

"Hugh!" exclaimed Max, "what are you doing? *What do* you mean by such behaviour?" But,

looking at Hugh, he soon saw that he was flushed and wild-looking, and guessed, what was indeed the case, that although not intoxicated, yet that his brother was evidently under the influence of the strong ale that he had been drinking, and was, contrary to his natural custom, disposed to be very cross and quarrelsome.

They now walked some way in silence, and the air and exercise began to restore poor Hugh to his usual state of feeling.

"Don't tell papa, or any one, Max," he said, in a humbled tone. "I beg your pardon for being so rude and striking you. You won't tell, will you?"

"Not if I can help it; on condition that you promise me never to do so again, and not to listen to John Orwell's nonsense. He is a bad fellow, I do believe. This is the second time he has led you into mischief."

"Oh, I will promise, Max," replied Hugh. "I am so sorry I did it; I will promise never again to do anything he asks me, without first consulting you. Will that do?"

"Yes," replied Max, "if you add to your promise that, when you have asked my advice, you will follow it."

"Well, you know, I meant that," said Hugh; "and you will not tell?"

"Not unless I am asked: in that case I must, you know," answered Max. "I'm excessively sorry that it has happened, though."

The boys now began to talk on other subjects; and Max told Hugh that he had at last caught a trout, and Hugh was so delighted as for a time quite to lose sight of his own troubles in his satisfaction at his brother's success.

It was late when the boys got home to Merton Lodge; and Hugh felt so unwell, from the effects of the unusual quantity of ale and the smell of smoke, that he was obliged to go at once to bed. All the younger children were in bed and asleep, so Max had no one to whom he could show his fish and talk of his success, except Nurse, who was always ready to sympathize with her dear Master Max in joy or sorrow, until his mother and sisters returned from their walk. Rachel was triumphant that Max had not been outdone by "that disagreeable John Orwell;" and Lucy and his mother also fully entered into the boy's pleasure in having caught so fine a fish. Max said that Hugh was gone to bed with a bad headache; and as he had finished his supper before they came in, he announced that he was tired and sleepy, and, wishing them all good-night, retired to his room.

When, after the rest were gone to bed, Hugh saw his mother standing by his bedside, and felt her place her hand on his forehead, and heard her gentle voice say "God bless you, my boy," he had almost risen up, and, throwing himself into her arms, told her all the sad story of his misconduct, and begged her to forgive him, and to ask his father's forgiveness for him. But John had made him promise that he would not tell any one, and so he only answered her loving words by a silent kiss, and, saying that his head was still bad, he lay down, and closed his eyes as if to sleep. But sleep would not come as usual, and the poor boy tossed on his bed, and, when he did fall asleep, restless dreams and troubled thoughts were his companions till the morning.

CHAPTER IV.

FAIRY-LAND.

WHILST the elder boys of the family had been engaged, as the last chapters have described, the little party at home had been amusing themselves according to their several ages and capacities, for it was a half-holiday, and, except poor Pen, who had her sentence of practising to perform, all were free for the afternoon. The little ones, Helen, Constance, and Frankie, were to go for a walk with Nurse; Maggie was to be drawn in her reclining carriage to a short distance from the house, where was a pretty copse, and a meadow with a brook running through it, on the banks of which grew many lovely wild flowers; and Penly—who had taken care to obtain leave from mamma so early in the day that her foe, Rachel, could not interfere with her—was to be her companion. Lucy and Rachel were meanwhile to accompany their mother on a visit to some friends, who lived about a mile from the town.

Poor little Maggie was delighted at the prospect of having a rather greater amount of enjoyment than she usually obtained; for it was not often that she was well enough for the degree of exertion that was requisite to enable her to reach "Fairy-land," as she and Pen had named this pretty nook; and, unless when the grass was dry, and the weather quite fine, she was not allowed to go there.

Now *everything* promised to be propitious.

There had been no rain for several days, and the grass in the meadow had been so lately cut that there was no risk of damp; and though the sun shone bright, and it was rather hot, there were beautiful trees under which Maggie's little carriage could be placed, and there Pen could sit with her, and read her one of those lovely "Fairy Tales," when they wanted to rest. Oh, it would be delightful indeed.

All day did poor restless Maggie worry those around her by her constant requisitions. Now Susan, the under nurse, must go and make sure that her carriage was ready: then she must go and ask some one to inspect the barometer, to see whether there was any chance of rain, and instead of being pleased and thankful at the prospect of pleasure that lay before her, she was even more fractious and vexing than ever.

The poor sick child had yet to learn the secret of that rest in God's love which can alone produce the blessing of a quiet mind; and, consequently, whether she was under the influence of suffering or of anticipated pleasure, she was a continual source of trial to all who had anything to do for her.

But at length the long wished-for time came, and Maggie was put into her carriage, and Nurse and the little ones, and Pen, were all dressed and ready, and the whole cavalcade set forth in high glee. Nurse was to see the sick child and her little companion comfortably settled under the trees, and then leaving them in charge of Susan, she and the younger children were to proceed on their more distant walk.

"Now, Pen," said Maggie, as soon as they were *left to themselves*, "you and Susan get me a

quantity of those beautiful forget-me-nots, and I will make a wreath for mamma, whilst you read me a story." Maggie had not heard of Rachel's forcible abduction of her favourite book, for she had been so fretful all the morning that Penly did not like to tell her at the moment it occurred, and before they set out on their expedition a circumstance had arisen that rendered it unnecessary.

We have seen how exceedingly angry Pen had felt at Rachel's taking her book from her, and that instead of feeling anything like submission to her sister's authority, she had, on the contrary, denounced it as harsh and unjust. In this state of mind she went into the schoolroom to perform her enforced penance of half an hour's practising, and, having accomplished it, rose from the piano, and hastened away to get ready for her walk. As she crossed the hall, Lucy, who was standing at the door, just preparing to set out on her expedition, with her mother and sister, asked her to run upstairs and fetch her gloves, which she had left on her dressing-table. Now it so happened that Lucy and Rachel occupied the same room, and as Penelope ran in to perform her errand, she descried her precious Fairy Tale-book on the shelf, where her sister had placed it when she had taken it away. With eager delight, and it must be confessed with but small feelings of compunction, the angry and self-willed little girl hastily laid hands on her favourite volume, and making a circuit round by the back stairs, contrived to deposit her stolen treasure in a safe hiding-place, and then ran down with the gloves to Lucy.

As soon as her mother and sisters had left the house, Pen dressed herself for her walk, and

seizing her book, hid it under her little brown holland jacket, and carried it to the field; secure in her disobedience, because Susan knew nothing of its having been taken from her, and she was well assured that Maggie, even if she knew it, would not feel anxiety on the score of any amount of rebellion against the authority of "Tempest."

Of course Penelope fully purposed replacing the book where she had found it, as soon as she got home, and now, full of delight at having repossessed herself of it and of the enjoyment that she knew her darling Maggie would have in hearing some of the beautiful tales, she laid it on Maggie's carriage, and begging her not to read until she came back with the forget-me-nots, she and Susan ran off to the brook, each hastening back from time to time with huge bunches of the beautiful flowers, and heaping them round Maggie until the little girl looked like a bird in its nest, and at last announced that she had enough, and begged them to come and begin the reading.

Pen mounted, with Susan's help, on a low branch of a tree close by Maggie, who announced that Pen was a fairy come to tell a beautiful story to a sick young princess, and that Susan was the eastern slave of the young princess, and was to sit on the ground and attend to the fairy's story, at the same time that she supplied her princess with jewels to make a crown. Thus directed, Susan seated herself on the grass, and set about preparing the flowers by removing the green leaves for Maggie, who began to tie the lovely blue blossoms into a wreath, placing them close together in a compact mass without any green.

Pen then commenced her reading. She had

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selected the amusing story of the little girl who let her spindle fall into the well, and was thereby led to a visit to fairy-land, where she found old Mother Flecke, and was rewarded by her for her skill in shaking her bed and her diligence in cleaning and taking care of her house, by a shower of gold, which clung to her hair and her dress, and every part of her, and made her a welcome guest; when, after a time, she was allowed to visit her unkind mother and sister.

All three girls were deeply interested in the story; but now before Pen proceeded to the second part of the visit of the bad sister to the old woman, Maggie begged for a further supply of flowers, as she had made a wreath for mamma, and now wanted to finish one she had begun for Lucy.

"And then, Miss Maggie, you must make one for Miss Rachel," said Susan.

"No, that I shall not," replied Maggie, scornfully; "we are not going to trouble ourselves for *her?* Are we, Pen?"

"I should think not," replied Pen.

"But that is not kind, Miss Pen," responded Susan. "Miss Rachel will be hurt if you make a wreath for your mamma, and one for Miss Frere, and none for her!"

"I don't care," replied Pen.

"But don't you think, Miss Pen, that if you were to try to please your sister and to win her love by being kind and gentle and obedient, that it would be better than always setting yourself against her so? You know our dear Saviour was mild and gentle, and He made no answer to those who reviled Him, and He even prayed for his enemies, those who murdered Him."

The little girls were silent and thoughtful for a moment. Then Maggie said,

"Who told you all that, Susan? I know it says so in the Bible—I have heard it read, but I never thought about it. What made you think about it now?"

"I often think about it when people are not kind, Miss Maggie," replied Susan. "My dear mother used to say when people spoke sharply, and threatened what they would do, and I was going to speak sharp in return, 'When He was reviled, He reviled not again. Try, my dear, to learn to exercise the meekness and gentleness of Christ;' and I often think of it when I hear you and your sisters speak so crossly of Miss Rachel."

"Well, Susan," answered Pen, "I do wish I could learn not to mind; but Rachel does vex and worry me so; however, I will try to be better and to remember what you say about Jesus Christ."

"And I will make Rachel a wreath, if you and Pen will get the flowers," said Maggie. "Now run quickly, for I want to hear about the sister, and whether she got a shower of gold too."

The flowers were soon gathered, for there were thousands of them close at hand; and then Pen resumed her reading and Susan and Maggie their wreath-making, until three lovely turquoise coronets lay in the water at the edge of the brook, where they were placed to keep them fresh until they could be bestowed on their respective owners; and the little girls had rejoiced their hearts with the discomfiture of the proud girl in the tale, who, instead of a shower of gold, was sent home covered with pitch and tar.

CHAPTER V.

HELP FOR MAGGIE.

JUST as the story was finished and the young reader and her companions were chatting over it, a new delight presented itself. Aunt Lucy and her little girl, their favourite cousin Emily, were seen to enter at the other end of the meadow, followed by a servant carrying a large basket. Emily and her mother were also both laden with rather heavy baskets; but the former, too impatient to wait until she could reach her cousins under the weight of her burden, set it on the ground and ran as fast as she could towards them, shouting aloud with glee. Pen hastened to meet her, whilst Susan ran off to fetch Emily's basket and help Mrs. Ellis with hers; and poor Maggie felt the time very long, although in fact it was scarcely a minute until the merry party and their burdens reached her.

Then came the unpacking and arranging the delicious feast of fresh fruits from Auntie's garden, and cream and milk from her dairy, and the nice loaf of home-baked bread and the sponge cake, all so unexpected and so very delightful! Cups were produced for them to drink milk from, and plates and spoons for the strawberries and cream; and

the two little cousins who were able to express their rapture by their activity danced round and round and clapped their hands, whilst poor Maggie was obliged to content herself with holding her kind aunt's hand very fast, and with tears in her eyes declaring that it "really was like a fairy-tale," and the place might well be called "Fairy Land."

After they had fully enjoyed their meal, Pen and Emily found it highly amusing to wash all the plates and cups in the brook, to the no small detriment of their frocks and stockings, whilst Susan and the other servant ate some of the good things that were given them and enjoyed a chat together under a tree at a little distance.

Meanwhile Mrs. Ellis sat down on the grass by the side of the little invalid, and began to talk to her in the kind and gentle manner that made Aunt Lucy such a welcome companion to young and old. She was the confidant and friend of every one, and deserved to be so; for she was always so considerate of others, so self-denying and so truly loving and charitable in her judgments, that no one could be afraid of her. She was in truth a simple and humble Christian—a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and like Him sought to please others rather than herself.

"Auntie," said Maggie, in a plaintive tone, "do you think I shall ever be able to walk and run about again? It seems so hard to see Emily and Pen enjoying themselves so much, and be always obliged to lie still!"

"It is sad, my child," replied her aunt, tenderly. "You know how glad we should all be to see you able to run about, and how anxiously papa and

mamma have tried every means in their power to get the use of your limbs restored. It is a great trial to us all, dear, to see you so."

"I don't think any one cares much about it now," replied Maggie, in a proud and rather sullen tone. "They used to care, or seem to, but now they all appear very well contented. See how Penelope and Emily are running and playing now, without even remembering how I am troubled. They can amuse themselves and do not care a bit about me; and it is always so—nobody cares for me!"

"Is that quite true, Maggie?" asked her aunt, gravely.

Maggie did not answer. She well knew that it was not true; she well knew that every one in her family cared, and was always ready to do all they could for her comfort; but in her peevishness she had, as she often did, asserted the contrary, and did not choose to admit the truth.

"Maggie, dear," said her aunt, after a pause, "if God saw fit to cure you, could not He do it?"

"Certainly He could," replied the child, crossly; "and then why does He not? It is exactly what I say—He does not care for me. He could cure me at once if He would, and His not doing so shows at once that He does not love me."

"Do you love Him, Maggie?" asked her aunt.

Maggie was silent. She had accustomed herself to murmur at the dispensations of God, but had never tried to love Him nor had the question fairly brought before her, and so was unprepared to answer it.

"Do you read your Bible, Maggie?" inquired Mrs. Ellis.

"A little, sometimes; but you know I cannot read long together, auntie," answered Maggie.

"Get some one to read it to you, love," replied her aunt. "I should like to read you one or two passages now, if you would like to listen. Shall I?"

"If you like it," answered Maggie, rather ungraciously, for she a little feared that what her aunt would select might be rather some passage that would imply reproof. She would have liked one of the pretty stories of Moses, or Daniel, or some other Scripture character, which would amuse her; but she shrank from hearing such passages as might be of any personal application.

But her aunt did not select any portion of God's Holy Word that might imply rebuke. On the contrary, she read a verse or two at a time, in different parts, that spoke of the true and changeless love of God to his creatures; of that dear love that led Him to give His own and only Son to death for sinners; that love which dwelt in Christ, and led Him to "humble Himself to the death on the cross for us miserable sinners;" and of the gracious influences of His Holy Spirit, the gift which that death purchased for us. She read the loving words that tell us that "we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities," but that in all the afflictions of His people He is afflicted.

As she read, and from time to time spoke a few words in explanation or application of the words of consolation, Maggie's proud spirit began to yield, and, after a few minutes, she was absorbed in

breathless attention. Mrs. Ellis spoke of that blessed rest that remaineth for the people of God, of that "perfect peace" that dwells in the heart of him who stayeth himself on God; and, as poor Maggie heard of all this, and contrasted in her mind the endless state of rebellion and *un*rest in which she herself lived, she felt that it would indeed be worth some trouble to attain so happy a state.

"But what can I do, Aunt Lucy—what *can* I do to get all this happiness? I would do anything in the world that I could; but I can do nothing whatever, so feeble as I am."

"You cannot, my dear," replied her aunt; "we can none of us do anything for ourselves. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' is the teaching of the Bible. 'He that believeth shall be saved.' 'Not by works of righteousness that we have done, *but by his mercy* He saved us.' You see, dear child, it is all His *free* and gracious gift! He 'gives His Holy Spirit to them that ask it;' and that Spirit must convince you that you are a sinner, and need salvation, and then He will 'take of the things of Christ, and show them unto you;' He will show you that there is no salvation *out* of Christ, and that there is 'no condemnation to them that are *in* Christ Jesus.' You have not loved God, my child, nor trusted Him. You could not love Him without first knowing that He loves you, and that, 'as a father pitieth his children, so will He have pity on you.' How loving and kind is His invitation to all."

"But is it to *me*, auntie? I have been such a naughty, wilful child; and given every one so much

trouble," said Maggie, humbly, and with her eyes cast down to the earth.

"I will give you a little bit of Scripture to learn, dear, that will answer that question. You will find it at the end of the 11th chapter of St. Matthew: learn the last three verses. 'Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.' You see *all* are invited; and so also in the 1st verse of the 55th of Isaiah. But, now, my child, here come Emily and Pen; and it is full time for you to go home. I will walk with you to the door, and we will talk of these things another day."

It was getting late when the little girls reached their home, and as Maggie was very tired, Nurse put her to bed at once; but, weary as she was, she could not settle to sleep until she had got Susan, after Nurse left the room, to read to her again the passage in the Bible that had so greatly interested her; and she fell asleep with the sacred and consoling words, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," yet sounding in her ears.

Meanwhile Pen was vainly seeking an opportunity of restoring the book to the place where she had found it. She ran upstairs as soon as possible, and was going into her sister's room, when Nurse laid hands on her, and bade her go and change her shoes which were damp from her having paddled too much by the edge of the brook, and when she had changed them, and taken off and

folded up her out of door dress, she again went to Rachel's room to restore the book, but finding the housemaid then arranging it, she could not manage to replace the volume on the shelf without notice, so quickly laying it on Rachel's chest of drawers, she hastened away, hoping that her sister would not remember exactly where she had left it, and that she would never know that it had been removed in her absence.

Poor little Penelope! She forgot the solemn fact that "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good;" and now went to bed and to sleep without the least apprehension of the storm that awaited her.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE FALSE STEP LEADS TO ANOTHER.

HUGH awoke the next morning with a bad headache and a heavy heart. He rose early as usual, but became very sick; and Max, who slept in the same room, persuaded him to return to bed for an hour, advice which the poor boy was fain to follow, as he was too ill to do otherwise. When the early breakfast-hour arrived, Max, who had been working in the garden, came to see how his brother felt, and finding him still in bed, and evidently, very unwell, he told his mother, and begged her to go to him, which she of course

did, and seeing at once that he was not in a fit state to rise, she gave him some medicine, and told him to keep quite quiet, and that Max should take a note from her to his school, to explain the reason of his absence.

Poor Hugh was exceedingly uncomfortable in mind, as well as in body. He knew that his father was to return home that evening, and would question him, as was his usual custom, on his progress at school, and his conduct both there and at home. And how could he answer those questions? He had widely transgressed and departed from his father's rules and orders, and yet he dared not own his fault.

If boys did but see into how many difficulties and errors one false step would lead them, they would surely be more considerate, and neither tempt others to do wrong, nor suffer their own foolish wishes and wills to lead them aside, and induce them to do that which would be likely to work them so much grief.

Hugh was now suffering severely in body and in mind, and all from a little want of self-command in bearing hunger, and of the power of resistance when urged to relieve that hunger by means that he knew to be sinful, because in direct disobedience to the injunction of his parents, and, to add to the evil, he had allowed himself to be partly cajoled and partly threatened into giving a promise that he would not tell any one where he had been.

John Orwell waylaid Max in his road to school, and began to use all his arts to induce him to bind himself by a promise that he would not say a word to his father, or any one else, as to where he had

found Hugh. "I say, Max," he began, "I hope you won't go and peach? You'll get a nice character as tell-tale in the town if you do, I can tell you."

"I can't help that, John," replied Max; "I must tell if I am asked, and I shall not if I am not asked. And now to be plain with you, I must say that I don't want to have any more to say to you; you know that my father had forbidden us to separate when we were out fishing, and you also know how strictly he has forbidden either of us to enter any public-house, or even to accept ale or cider from farmers if any should be offered to us; and then when I was busy, you take advantage of it, and lead Hugh into all that mischief; and, not content with that, you bind the poor fellow by a promise not to tell. I call it bad, underhand conduct."

"Oh, well," said John, in a raised tone; "that is very fine talking; but I doubt whether you would not find yourself somewhat in the background, if Hugh were to tell. It would sound well that when the poor fellow complained that he was starving, and asked his brother to go home, his mightiness only gave him a gruff refusal, and then was so busy with his own amusement as never to notice that his dear little charge had broken his dear papa's rules, and left his sweet, loving brother, who would not listen to his complaints of hunger, to go with one who was more kindly disposed, and offered to give the poor lad a bit of bread and cheese."

"Come now, Max," he continued in a changed tone, "don't be ill-natured. You know it was just this, and no more—Hugh was hungry, I offered

him food, and he accepted it; and, of course, I could not know that a draught of common ale would give the boy headache. It's much more likely that going so long without food in the heat, and gazing into the water, has hurt him. I am very sorry, and I will take care next time; so now, Max, be friends, and don't go and get both Hugh and me into trouble. You won't, will you?"

"I cannot make any other promise than I have made both to you and Hugh," replied Max. "What you say is true. I ought not to have been so taken up with my fishing; and, I daresay, it was partly the long fagging that made Hugh ill. But you know, John, if you were as well satisfied as you profess to be, that you had done nothing wrong, you would not be so anxious that I should not tell my father, for you know he is too just to be angry without cause."

"Oh, yes," answered John, "Uncle Frere is a brick and a trump, I know that. However, right or wrong, I would rather he were not told. So now, good-bye, old fellow; my love to Hugh, and tell him to keep up his heart, and all will blow over."

And saying this John turned down a bye-street that led towards his home; and Max, hastily running up the steps of the school-house, was soon too deeply immersed in Greek roots and Latin verses to think anything more of other matters, however vexatious.

And how had it fared with the other members of the family? Pen was in bed and sound asleep, when Rachel, with her mother and sister, returned from the country visit to which they had gone. They had had tea out of doors, and spent a very

pleasant evening; and as they had a mile to walk after they left their friends, it was late before they reached home. The supper-tray was on the table, Hugh was gone to bed, and Max went almost as soon as they returned; the girls, therefore, did not go upstairs, but, laying aside their hats and mantles, sat down with their mother to partake of their usual light supper, after which the servants came in to family prayers, and then the whole party went to their rooms.

The moment Rachel entered hers, her sharp eyes fixed on the fairy tale-book as it lay on the chest of drawers. She could remember that she had placed it on her bookshelf, and the thought at once rushed into her mind that Pen had taken it. Eagerly seizing and opening it, a blossom of the forget-me-not, much too fresh to have been put there the day before, fell from between the leaves, where it had been placed to mark where they left off reading, and with the book in her hand, and the little flower to bear witness against her, Rachel, with a triumphant feeling in her heart at having detected the delinquency, rushed straight to the room where the child slept (which was a little room adjoining the nursery, and was shared with her by Helen), and seizing the poor little culprit by the shoulder, she roughly awoke her.

At first Penelope, who had been sunk in the sound sleep of childhood, was startled at seeing her sister standing over her, and sprang up thinking that it was morning, and that she had overslept herself, and began to get out of bed; at the same time exclaiming in a hurried half-asleep voice—

"Yes, I am coming, I shall soon be ready!"

"Lie down and don't be silly, Pen," exclaimed Rachel, in an angry voice. "You are a very naughty, disobedient, sly child. What book have you been reading this afternoon? Tell me this moment," she added vehemently, "I will know!"

Pen, half-asleep and dreadfully alarmed, made no reply, and Rachel continued—

"Now tell me, I *insist* on knowing."

Thus adjured, Pen murmured out some indistinct words, which sounded very like a denial that she had been reading at all, and Rachel then sharply demanded:—

"Have you been reading the Fairy Tales, or have you not? answer at once."

"*No*," replied Pen, "you took it away, you know."

And, covering her face with the bed-clothes, the poor child began to cry and sob as if she would break her heart. She had told a story; she had made up her mind never to do so again, and now she had told a direct untruth. Had it been her kind mother, or gentle sister Lucy, who had asked her the question, it is probable that Pen would not have denied having taken the book; or if, in her foolish weakness, she had done so, she would then, when she was under the influence of her resolution to be a better child, have owned that she had done wrong in saying "No," and confessed her fault; but with Rachel she could not do so, and having once said that she had not touched the book, she gave way to the dictates of her sinful heart; and, in reply to her sister's repeated questions, gave repeated and stronger denials.

Then Rachel told her of the discovery she had

made, and how she had detected the removal of the book; and calling her "a wicked little story-teller" she left her with the comforting assurance that "every one in the house should know what sort of child she was," and that "papa would now be convinced when he returned on the next evening, that she was right about Pen." And so saying, she left the poor little body to sob herself to sleep, and to wake in the morning with a troubled heart. Thus it was that Rachel failed to win the love which she so much coveted. She would have given much to be beloved by her little sisters as Lucy was, but she had not as yet learnt that it is love and gentleness that wins love; and that the strict severity of the law—the unflinching dealing out of judgment and justice, untempered by mercy and pity, cannot act beneficially on the offender, or draw his heart towards the dispenser of such severe discipline.

It is the love shown us by Christ that draws the sinner to repentance and to God, and not the terrors of the law!

As Penelope was going across the hall the next morning in her way to the garden where the children were allowed to play for half an hour before breakfast, she was met by Rachel, who told her that she was to go immediately to her mother in her dressing-room.

Poor Pen's heart sank within her. She well knew the cause of that summons, and her uneasy conscience warned her that not only would punishment follow her offence, but that she should sink still lower than before in the opinions of those whom she loved, and whose love she so earnestly *desired to possess.*

With slow and unwilling steps she turned towards the staircase, her heart full of angry feelings towards Rachel and of hesitation as to what course she should pursue. Should she repeat the untruths of last night? No—she determined that *nothing* should make her do that. Should she frankly throw herself on her mother's mercy and confess all?

That she knew would be the best, but whether she should be able to do it was the question. She thought not, and then there was no resource for her but to neither confess nor deny, enduring her punishment whatever it might be, in sullen silence. This was, alas! but too often poor Pen's course, and a very bad one it was.

Lingering on her way as much as possible, she at length reached her mother's door, but had not courage to knock for admission. Happily for her, as she stood there Susan came by, and Pen in her dismay told her that her mamma had sent for her, because Rachel was angry with her about a book; and suddenly remembering that Susan had seen her reading it, she besought her not to say that she had it, and especially not to tell Maggie that she was in disgrace. "Maggie did not know that Rachel had taken it away, and that I was not to have it, and she will cry so if she hears that I am to be punished! If I am, *don't* tell her, that's a dear good Susan!" she added eagerly.

"I won't, Miss Pen," replied Susan. "It is no business of mine, and I am not obliged to meddle in it to vex you or your sister. But you know, Miss Pen, if your mamma or any one else should ask me whether I saw you with the book, I must

of course say that I did. You know I could not tell an untruth."

Pen hung down her head and blushed as Susan said this. Susan was but a young country girl, and not so well instructed as she was; but she was a better girl and more worthy of respect, and Penelope at that moment felt deeply what a good thing it was to speak the truth and deserve respect. "What *can* I do, Susan?" she said sorrowfully; "do not go away, but do try to help me."

"Oh, go straight to your mamma, and tell her the whole truth at once, dear Miss Pen. Do, now, there's a dear young lady; don't stop to think, and get frightened again, but remember about the Prodigal Son, how his father received him, and go and confess as he did. Shall I tell you what I would do, Miss Pen? I would go into that little room, and kneel down, and ask God to have pity on me for His dear Son's sake, and to help me to tell, and to help me to bear whatever punishment I might have to bear. Ask the kind Father to pity His poor, weak little child, and help her through it all; and then go and tell everything."

Penelope had followed Susan a few steps, that she might not be within hearing of her mother, so as to be called in, and stood now near the door of a sort of closet in which boxes and other lumber were kept; and when Susan hurried away to her nursery duties, Pen turned into the closet, and, throwing herself on her knees, followed Susan's wise advice, and rose calmer; and, though much frightened still, she walked at once to her mother's door and knocked.

She was told to come in; but when she had done

so, and was within the door, her new-found courage seemed all to fly away, and she stood with her head hanging down, the very picture of irresolution and dread.

"Come here, Penelope," said Mrs. Frere, gravely, but without anything like anger in her voice. "Come near me, my dear, and answer some questions. Rachel tells me that you have been very naughty and disobedient, and, what is worst of all, have told a direct untruth. Now, do not answer in a hurry, but think a little before you speak, and then give me your account of this matter."

As Mrs. Frere spoke, she drew the child towards her, and, passing her arm round her waist, looked affectionately but sorrowfully at her, and added, "The truth, dear Pen—let me hear the whole truth!"

"I had better not *think*, mamma," said Pen, bursting into tears, and slipping to the ground until she knelt before her mother, with her face hid in her lap. "I had better speak at once, or I shall get frightened again, perhaps, and say what is not true. Oh, mamma, it is all true that Rachel says. I did take the book she said I should not have, and put it back slyly; and then I told Rachel that I had not. Oh, do forgive me, dear mamma! I don't mean not punish me, but *don't* tell Maggie, and don't leave off loving me!"

"My child, I shall not leave off loving you," replied her mother, kindly, "and I will not tell Maggie, nor allow her to be told the particulars of your offence until you can tell her yourself. But that will not be just yet, Pen; for I cannot let so serious a fault pass unnoticed; and I shall, there-

fore, not permit you to go to your sister for some hours to come, nor can I allow you to join the rest of the family this morning. You must stay here, my dear, and I will send you some breakfast; and, by-and-by, I will come and have a little more talk with you.

"My child, I wish you to know that your confession has saved you from much that I should have been obliged to lay on you, had you persisted in untruth. But we will speak of this after breakfast; now I must go, or your brothers will be late at school;" and, affectionately kissing her penitent child, Mrs. Frere hastened to the breakfast-room, where she was greeted by the intelligence that Hugh was very unwell and could not get up.

A visit to his room was the next demand on the time and heart of the busy and anxious mother, and, had she known the cause of her boy's indisposition, it would have been a very painful one. As it was, she saw nothing to alarm her about Hugh, and, sending nurse to him with some medicine, and directions not to get up, she proceeded to attend to the duties of the breakfast-table, and then to those of her household, before she entered on the task of holding separate private conversations with Rachel and Pen. She then had to supply to poor Maggie the place of her usual little companion, as well as to attend to the requirements of nurse, and to give one or two lessons in the departments of education which she herself undertook; so that she had full employment before her until dinner-time.

Loud were the inquiries at the breakfast-table for Penly. Rachel could only look mysterious, for she had been forbidden by her mother to speak on

the subject; and Mrs. Frere quietly answered that she hoped Pen would appear at dinner, but that she had kept her upstairs for a time—leaving the party free to guess whether it was from the requirements of bodily or of mental discipline that they were deprived of their little sister's company.

CHAPTER VII.

MAGGIE MAKES EFFORTS.

"WELL, mamma, what am I to do with Penelope?" asked Rachel, as soon as she could get her mother's attention. "It is almost school-time, and as you told me that I was never to punish without your orders, I must be told, please."

"You need do nothing, my dear," replied Mrs. Frere, "I shall see to it myself. Your sister will not come into the school-room this morning, and I wish you not to say a word to any one of what has passed with regard to her."

"That is rather hard then, I think," replied Rachel. "How can it be expected that I should have any authority over the children, or possibly be able to teach them, if such behaviour as Pen's is to be passed over and no notice taken of it?"

"My dear," replied her mother gravely, "I did not say that I should pass over Penelope's fault without notice. Your poor little sister has deserved punishment, and must have it; but, Rachel, you grieve me very much by the manner in which you

behave to the children, and by the spirit in which you carry on your attempts to manage them. I have heard from Nurse, and from Penelope herself, of all that passed yesterday about that book, and indeed, my dear child, you behaved very unwisely. In the first place you were very tyrannical in laying so severe a punishment on your sister, for so slight a fault; and, in the second place, you were very unwise in pressing such questions on her, when she was frightened and half-asleep, as were almost sure to lead one so timid, and so much disposed to prevaricate, into telling you an untruth."

"I told her to practise, mamma; and when I heard her leave off after ten minutes, and then found her busied in her story-book, and saw her hide it away when she heard me coming, of course I was angry. *I* do not consider disobedience and such sly behaviour slight faults," said Rachel, in rather an impertinent tone and manner.

"It was scarcely to be called disobedience, Rachel," replied Mrs. Frere. "Penelope did practise for a time, and as you had not said how long, and as she does not like music very much, or I should rather say does not like practising, the time probably seemed to her longer than it really was. The proper thing for you to have done would have been gently to take the book from her, and send her back to the piano, telling her that she should not have the book again until she had practised for a certain and fixed time."

"But she was so sly, mamma. It was that that made me angry. I do hate slyness and deceit," continued Rachel, hastily.

"But, dear Rachel," replied her mother, kindly, "if you were less impetuous and severe, your little pupils would not be so much afraid of you; and, believe me, that there is nothing that so much interferes with truth and frankness as fear. Why are you so violent with them? I have so often warned you of the consequences of making the children so much afraid of you."

"There is no other way of managing them, mamma. It will never do to let them go on acting as they please, and disobeying my orders as they do. I am sure I am perfectly *just* with them, and they must and shall be kept in order," said Rachel, her pride and anger increasing as she spoke.

"There *is* another way, Rachel," replied her mother. "Do not you remember those pretty lines that your aunt gave us?—

> "Speak gently, it is better far
> To rule by *love* than fear."

Rachel cast down her eyes; they were full of tears, but she did not like her mother to see it. The poor girl pined for love; but she was not loved by her family, and she knew and felt it deeply.

"Better *far*, Rachel. Is it not a better way than yours, my dear?" asked Mrs. Frere.

"How can I rule by love, when nobody loves me?" replied Rachel, her tears now overcoming her, and flowing freely. "The more I try to do right, the less people love me. There is no one in the world except Max that cares for me, and that is what I get for trying to do my duty."

"You are wrong, dear child," replied her mother,

putting her arm round the sobbing girl; "*I* love you, and your father loves you, and so I am sure does Max."

Rachel was silent; her heart told her that this was true. "Now try Rachel whether you cannot make the others love you as well as they love Lucy and me. Try to be gentle, and kind with them; try to have sympathy with them. Put yourself into their places, in mind, and remember the rule 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you.' You will never either rule well, or win love, whilst you love justice better than mercy, whilst you are so eager to detect faults and misdemeanours, and show yourself so anxious to inflict punishment, even beyond the measure of the offence."

"Do not reply, my dear," added Mrs. Frere, seeing that Rachel was about to speak; "but think over what I have said, and try whether you cannot follow my advice. Now quiet yourself, my child, and go and sit a little with Maggie. I have forbidden Penelope to leave my room until I go to her, and Maggie is alone; but remember you are not to say anything to her about Pen. If she asks why she has not come as usual, you may say that she is with me."

When, after having bathed her eyes, and so got rid of all appearance of agitation, Rachel entered her little sister's room, she found her just dressed, and lying on her couch, with a small table by her side, on which were the three pretty forget-me-not wreaths, looking quite fresh and as lovely as ever, Nurse having kindly laid them on a shallow dish of water, so that the stems might be in it, and the blossoms not soaked.

Maggie was not pleased at seeing Rachel enter instead of her mamma or Penly, whom she had been expecting, and asked rather crossly where the others were, saying that Pen had not been near her for the morning, and that now it was nearly school-time.

Rachel replied as she had been directed that Pen was with her mamma, and could not come. She spoke more gently than usual, for her feelings had been touched by what her mother had said, and she felt subdued and sorrowful. Maggie, who was very quick in observations, perceived this, and looking at her sister saw at once that she had been crying, but said nothing.

After a minute's silence Maggie drew Rachel's attention to the wreaths; "Are not they pretty?" she asked. "Very," replied Rachel; "where did you get them?"

"Oh, we made them yesterday," replied Maggie; "we had such a delightful afternoon at 'Fairy-land.' I sat in my carriage under the trees, whilst Pen and Susan gathered the flowers; Susan prepared the stems, and I tied the wreaths, whilst Pen read us such a lovely story;" and the little girl proceeded to tell her sister all about the good and naughty girls, and the showers of gold and of pitch that were their respective rewards. "And who do you think the wreaths are for?" she asked in conclusion.

Rachel, in whom the mention of the story-book had raised again some of the angry as well as of the painful feelings that it had been the innocent means of producing, replied in one of her old cross tones, "I don't know I'm sure; how should I know

who they are for? For your two selves and Susan, I suppose."

Maggie flushed up angrily, and was very near giving a rude answer to Rachel's cross speech; but somehow a recollection of what Susan had said the night before about trying to win Rachel's love, and of the gentleness of Him who, "when He was reviled, reviled not again," stole over her, and instead of doing so, said, "No; guess again. Well, perhaps you will not guess right, so I must tell you: one is for mamma, and one for Lucy, and one for you;" and, taking up the prettiest of the wreaths—for Nurse had nicely dried them—she added, "now stoop down your head, and let me crown you."

"There! oh, you look beautiful, Rachel!" she exclaimed, when she had adjusted the wreath amongst Rachel's pretty curling hair; "I did not think you were half so pretty! and you look so soft and kind," she added with a surprised tone.

Rachel was greatly touched. That her little sisters should have been engaged in working to please her just at the very time when she had, by an unjust punishment, tried to prevent their promised pleasure, came home to her conscience with an uneasy feeling, and the fact that the very first time they should have made an attempt to gratify her, should have been just at the moment that she had denounced an unjustly severe punishment on them (for to punish Pen was to punish Maggie), almost overcame her. Maggie's compliment, too, and her remark on the expression of her countenance, also added to her confusion, and stooping and kissing Maggie affectionately, she put an end to the scene by hastening out of the room.

So much was her mind occupied that she went

into the school-room, where all the little party of her pupils was assembled, with her wreath on her head, and surprised the children by passing over the involuntary smiles and inattentions that her appearance created, without reproof. She, however, soon discovered the cause of their excitement, and removed it; but at the first moment she could be spared she took the wreath to her room, and placed it in water; and long were some of the flowers of this first token of amity from her little sisters, kept as relics amongst her treasures.

Penelope appeared at dinner. She was thoughtful and subdued, but not, as usual after punishment, sullen and rude. None of her brothers and sisters, save Rachel, knew what had been the cause of her seclusion during the early part of the day, and even Rachel did not know what had passed between the mother and her child; but from the day that Pen had been confined to her mother's dressing-room for the morning, it was allowed by all that she was a different child from what she had been before; and that though often neglectful of her duty and sometimes showing a disposition to speak or act untruly, she was from that day more watchful, and never again was known to tell an untruth.

In the afternoon she was allowed to join her sisters in the school-room, and afterwards to be with Maggie; and then all her heart was poured out to her sympathizing little sister, and she told her of all her misconduct, and Maggie told Pen in return all that dear Aunt Lucy had said to her the night before, and confided to her her own determination to strive to be less selfish, and not to mind being plain and deformed, but to try to learn some *lessons every day*, and see if she could not do some-

thing that might comfort her dear mamma, instead of being a trouble to every one. And thus, in the affectionate interchange of sympathy with each other's new-made resolutions of amendment, the time passed on until the little girls were summoned to tea.

Maggie usually had her tea sent her when any strangers were there, and she knew that two gentlemen were expected to tea; but now, in pursuance of her newly-formed resolution "not to mind," she determined to *walk* into the tea-room, an effort of which she was quite capable, but from which she shrank on account of her dislike to being looked at.

With Nurse's arm round her waist to support her, the poor feeble child, half repenting her resolution, accordingly entered the room. Imagine her delight when she saw that her own dear papa and her favourite Uncle Hugh were the visitors! What an unexpected joy and what a reward for her effort it was, when her father taking her fondly in his arms, himself laid her on her couch, and dear Uncle Hugh exclaimed as he came and kissed her, "Why how is this my dear child? How glad I am to see my dear little Maggie so much improved, why I should scarcely know you! What have they been doing to you, Mag, to make you look so bright and cheerful?"

"I have been to 'Fairy-land, uncle," replied Maggie, merrily, "and there I learnt several things that I think will do me good!" she added, blushing.

"Well, and what might they be?" asked her uncle. "What did the Fairies say to you?"

"Ask Aunt Lucy, uncle. She will tell you," was Maggie's answer.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUGH IN TROUBLE.

THIS little conversation had been carried on in a low voice, and Mr. Ellis now turned from Maggie and began to talk to her brothers, who just then entered the room together.

"Well Max, how has the rod answered?" he inquired.

"Oh capitally, uncle. I do like it so very much. However, I have only caught one fish myself and that Maggie had for her dinner to-day; but John Orwell caught one, the first that was caught," answered Max.

"What, with your rod?" inquired Mr. Ellis.

"Yes, uncle. We went out together yesterday, and he and I used it in turn. I was stupid and could not do anything. I think I took a wrong fly, for when John changed it he soon caught a fish and then I took a different one again—a governor, uncle—and soon caught a second."

Some further discussion of flies and fishing here followed, during which papa and his little girls were in full chat, whilst mamma made the tea and Lucy was busied with the bread and butter; Rachel, whose office it was, having not yet appeared. Hugh alone sat silent. At length his father inquired—

"Why Hugh, what's the matter? Your tongue does not usually rest so long. What is it my boy?"

Hugh coloured, and his eyes filled with tears; but his mother spared him the necessity of speaking by saying that Hugh had been in bed with head-

ache and sickness all the morning; that she thought the heat had made him bilious, and advised him to content himself with some dry toast and not partake of the fruit and cake that was on the table; advice to which the poor boy was quite willing to listen, as he still felt very unwell. He was sadly anxious too, in mind, for he was in continual fear whilst the fishing was under discussion that some question would be asked him which he should find it difficult to answer; and his guilty conscience led him to fancy that every eye was on him, and that all must be suspecting that there was some hidden cause for his indisposition, when in truth such a thought had not entered the mind of any one present.

So true it is that sin always brings its own punishment; for howmuchsoever it may be hidden from man, there is that within us that always speaks the truth, and will give no rest until the sin has, with confession and repentance, been brought to Christ for pardon.

After tea, Mr. and Mrs. Frere and some of the young ones went home with Mr. Ellis to see Aunt Lucy and Emily. Maggie of course could not go, and Pen obtained leave to remain with her. Poor Hugh was advised to keep quiet in the garden, or to go to bed if he liked it better; his mother remarking that as he still seemed far from well, perhaps it would be his wisest course.

Hugh did not however go to bed. When all the rest of the party were gone, and he was left alone with his books, his mind became busied with the painful position into which he had brought himself. He knew that he should have no peace of mind whilst the act of disobedience, which he had committed, was unconfessed. He knew also that he

was now in the power of his cousin, who would take advantage of the hold he had thus obtained over him, to worry him continually by threats, if he did not do exactly as he would have him, and to induce Hugh to lend or give him all his allowance, and any other money that he might have given him, and yet he dared not relieve his mind by at once confessing his fault and bearing its punishment.

"I'll take good care," thought he in his sorrow, "that the next time I do wrong I will not be such a blockhead as to promise not to tell. However, I have brought myself into the mess now, and I must bear the consequence. As soon as ever I have learnt my lessons for to-morrow, I'll go to bed, and perhaps I may sleep and forget all about it."

In pursuance of this design Hugh applied himself diligently to his lessons, and had soon mastered them, and then to bed he went and to sleep; not however as he hoped, to forget his troubles, but to meet them again in all sorts of exaggerated and painful forms in his dreams, and to fight with imaginary terrors, until he awoke, trembling and crying, to find his mother with a light in her hand, standing by his side, and quite alarmed at the state in which she found him.

Mrs. Frere sat down by her boy's bed, and tried to soothe his agitation, and after a few minutes of quiet talk, aided by a draught of cold water which he asked her to give him, she was able to leave him; but not without feelings of anxiety, for not knowing that his restlessness arose from mental disturbance, she naturally ascribed it to illness, and feared that fever or some other serious indisposition *was commencing.*

In the morning Hugh rose refreshed, and pretty well; and although of course his fears of discovery and his feelings of anxiety were still alive, yet they were lessened; and having eaten his breakfast, he and Max prepared to set out for school.

When they were just starting Hugh discovered that one of his books had been left upstairs, and fearing that they would be late, he begged Max to go on, and he would come after him as soon as he had found it. Max accordingly hastened on, and Hugh, having found his book where he thought he had left it, lost no time in setting out, expecting to overtake his brother before he reached the school. He was, however, disappointed in this hope. As he turned the corner of the house into the next street, he found himself suddenly arrested in his course by the grasp of a strong hand on his shoulder, and, turning round, beheld his cousin John. Frightened and annoyed, for he felt very angry with John, as well as afraid that he would use the advantage he had gained over him to lead him into further difficulties, if not into mischief, Hugh tried to get away; but in vain—John held him fast.

"I say, Hugh, I want half a crown; can you lend it to me?" he said.

"No," replied Hugh; "I don't want to have anything more to do with you, John. Please to let me go; I shall be late for school."

"That may be, sir," replied John. "It's no concern of mine, if you are. I am not going to let you go till I have that half-crown."

"But I have not got one, John, at least not here, and if I had I should not lend it to you," answered *Hugh, trying to wrench* himself from John's grasp,

which only tightened on him all the more from his struggles to get free.

"Out with the money, sir, or else I go straight to my uncle, and tell him what you would not very well like him to know," said John, laughing.

"I don't care," said Hugh; "I have not the money, and if I have it not, I can't give it to you," and again he tried to get free, but still vainly.

"Then if you have it not now, get it when you go home, and bring it to the wicket-gate, at the end of the garden. I shall be there after school to receive it. I shall wait about till half-past twelve, and when you come, if you whistle twice, I shall know it is you, and only you; mind you come alone, for I don't want to be seen by my uncle, or the Emperor, or any one else. If you are there, and give me the money, then all will be right, and if not—well, then, Master Hugh, you will have but little chance of going to the grand pic-nic next month, for I shall go at once to the house, and tell my uncle that you and my friend Max broke the laws, and went larking, and that his imperial highness wanted to make me go too; but I was virtuous, and minded what my pa had told me, and would not be led into wickedness by you two excellent gentlemen."

Such was John's artful and wicked reply to poor Hugh, and he, silly fellow, believing that John would make good his threat, fearing that if he were kept longer he should be too late at school, promised that he would bring the money, and then John let him go.

Alas! how true it is that one false step leads to another! Hugh was a very true boy, and had a *horror of anything* like duplicity; but he had now

got himself involved in difficulties. He was late at school; the names had been called over, and he was not there to answer to his, consequently he was fined; and when Max asked him what had kept him so, he replied that he could not find his book. Then again there was a difficulty before him. He had asked Lucy to take care of his money. How should he get the half-crown from her? She would be sure to ask him what he was going to do with it, for though it was his own money, and he had a right to use it as he chose, he was not in the habit of spending so much at once, except for something very particular; or at all without an immense deal of consultation with his friends Lucy and Max. His thoughts were occupied about this business all school-time, so that he worked carelessly, lost two places in his class, and was reproved by his master; and when school was over, and he released, he ran off without waiting for Max.

The school broke up at twelve, and there was only half an hour for him to get home, procure the money, and be at the gate to meet John. He rushed home as fast as he could go, and flew from one room to another in search of Lucy; but Lucy was not to be found. School was over, and she was gone out with the children. He knocked at the door of his mother's dressing-room, and, getting no answer, went in. The room was empty; but on the table lay a heap of account-books, some open, and by them a considerable quantity of silver and pence.

The time for his meeting with John drew very near, as he had seen by the hall-clock as he passed, and off he started to see if his mother could be *found in the nursery*. Nurse only was there with

little Frankie, who, delighted at seeing his brother, began to solicit him for a game of romp.

"Get along, Frankie," said Hugh, pushing the child away, and, in his haste, so roughly as to throw him down and make the little fellow cry. "Nurse, have you seen mamma?"

"No, sir, not lately," replied Nurse, raising her little charge and comforting him. "But, how ever can you be such a naughty boy, Master Hugh, pushing about your dear little brother in such a way? Go out of the nursery, sir, if you cannot behave better. I don't doubt your mamma is in her room."

And away went Hugh more and more troubled as he felt that the time was passing, and he had done nothing as yet to procure the money that was to stop John from making his charge.

Once more he entered his mother's room; this time, in his hurry, without, as was usual, knocking at the door, and she was not there. And now a sudden temptation came over him, one half-crown would not be missed from all that heap of money, and as soon as Lucy came in he would get one from her and replace it; or if it had been missed, would own what he had done, and restore it. And so, acting on the impulse of the moment, Hugh took possession of the piece of money, and flew to his appointment.

There was no one in the garden. He reached the wicket undiscovered, whistled, and on John's instantly appearing, put the money into his hand without speaking, turned, and ran hastily back to the house.

Poor Hugh was now in a state of great distress and trouble. He felt that he had actually stolen

money; and though he tried to comfort himself with the thought that he should return the half-crown to his mother, yet his conscience told him that he had done wrong, and that he stood in the position of a thief. He felt that it really was so; because he had not only taken the money, but he had done it secretly, and with intention to say nothing to any one about it. His hope was to see Lucy as he got back to the house, to get the money from her, and restore it to the heap without loss of time, and before it had been missed. But in this hope he was frustrated. Lucy, who from her dilatory habits was often too late, did not make her appearance until all were seated at the table, and as a gentleman happened to call during dinner, who had come from a distance, and came in and took some luncheon with them, they were kept longer at the table than usual, and it was school-time before they were released; and, consequently, he had to hasten away without getting a word from his sister.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISSING HALF-CROWN.

DURING the early part of dinner, Mr. Frere had asked his wife what she had been doing all the morning.

"Busy as usual, I daresay?" he said laughing.

"Not only as busy as usual," replied she, "but *rather more so;* for I could not get my accounts

to balance. You know what a fidget I am about having them accurate, and I was just half a crown out in my reckoning; and that made me add up the pages again and again, and worried me."

"More than the matter was worth," replied Mr. Frere. "But did you get it right at last?"

"No," she replied, "I gave it up. Perhaps, I shall find out what I had omitted to enter, when I have thought about it."

Here the conversation dropped; but Hugh, who had flushed scarlet when his mother first spoke, now remained pale and silent. No one, however, noticed him; and, before the cloth was withdrawn, his father looked at his watch, and told the boys that they might be excused, and had better go at once.

"After school, then," thought Hugh, "I will not lose a minute, and then I think I will tell mamma that I took it. No, I *can't* do that, I will put it into one of her drawers, and then when she finds it she will think she had left it there."

Poor Hugh! An acted lie though not a spoken one! Where will it end?

But Hugh reckoned falsely. When he returned from school, he found that Lucy was gone to drink tea with Aunt Lucy and Uncle Hugh; and as she would not return home until ten, and he always went to bed at nine, there was no hope of his seeing her and getting his money that day. What could he do?

He resolved on doing that which was the next best thing to going at once to his mother and making full confession, and that was to consult Max. But as he did not make up his mind to this *until quite late in the* evening, he did not find an

opportunity to execute his purpose until after their school work was prepared. Then he asked him to come out for a walk with him, telling him that he wanted to talk with him. As soon as the boys were in the fields, Hugh exclaimed—

"Max, I am wretched! I have been an ass, and a fool, and a wicked wretch into the bargain!"

And then abusing himself and John in turn, he proceeded to tell his brother all that had passed between him and his cousin in the morning, and of the exceeding anxiety he had been in when he found that Lucy was not to be spoken to; ending by telling him of the means he had taken to obtain the money, and the utter misery of heart that he had felt when his mother spoke of the deficiency in her accounts at dinner. He then asked him if he would lend him half a crown until he could see Lucy.

Max was grave and thoughtful. "It is a bad business, Hugh, from beginning to end," he said, after a minute's silence. "As to the money, you are welcome to it, and I do not care whether I ever see it again or not; but I do care very much that you should allow John to lead you as you do, and I do care *very* much that you should have taken that money. What will you do when you have got the half-crown?"

"Why, I thought of slipping it into mamma's drawer; and then, some day, she will find it, and think that it had been there all along," he replied.

"No, Hugh," replied Max, "that's a 'crooked way.' I don't like crooked ways. Be straightforward and true, and go and tell mamma all about it. I will let you have the money willingly if you will do that; but I really cannot sanction or advise *anything that is* not true in act as well as in word.

We have enough on our consciences without your doing that."

"But she will want to know why I was in such haste for the money that I could not wait for Lucy, and why I did not ask her to lend it to me," replied Hugh, half inclined to follow his brother's advice, yet still very doubtful.

"Then tell her; tell her that John had asked you to lend it to him, and that you had promised to do so, and he was waiting at the wicket for the money," answered Max. "That is the truth."

"Well, I will, Max," replied Hugh. "She will be angry with me for lending money, I know, because she told me last time I was not to lend it to John; and I am half afraid she will suspect that John has got some hold over me again. However, I believe it is the only way, for I hate crooked ways as much as you do, Max; and, once out of this scrape, I will take good care for the future how I act."

"Well, then," answered Max, "let us go home at once, before your courage oozes out. When a thing is determined on, the sooner it is done the better."

According to this determination, the boys turned at once homeward, talking as they went of the probable results of Hugh's confession to his mother, and also on the painful subject of the entanglement with John that had led to all their troubles.

Hugh found his mother in the garden; and at once told her all that he had to disclose, with many expressions of sorrow and promises that such a thing should never again occur.

"I am glad you have confessed your fault, Hugh," said Mrs. Frere. "You have been much

to blame; but as you are conscious of having done wrong, I shall say no more about it. I shall not take Max's money to replace that which you took; but you must, of course, replace it as soon as you can get some of your own from your sister.

"As you have lent money to your cousin when I had forbidden you to do so, I shall require of you not to spend any for a month from this time. If there should be any little subscription on foot for a charitable purpose, or any pleasure towards which you would be expected to pay your share, remember you are excluded by this act from it. And let this be a warning to you, my boy, never to supply your needs by making use of money that is not your own. It is in this way that clerks in banks, or in public offices, are so apt to get into dishonest habits, which end in their utter destruction. They use money that is not their own; at first, with the full design of replacing it before it is called for; then, perhaps, they fail to do so, and if their theft, for such I must call it, passes undiscovered, they are led to repeat the same peculations, until they end in defrauding their masters to a larger and still larger amount, are discovered, and branded as thieves and cheats. Beware of the first step in sin, dear Hugh. It is happy for you that you have such a good and honest brother to advise you; and a mercy that God has in this case led you to the only right course of action. Now go, my boy; you know your punishment, and I trust to your honour to observe it faithfully."

With a lightened heart, Hugh recapitulated to Max what had passed, at the same time restoring *the half-crown* that his mother had refused to re*ceive; and then*, with an earnest resolution never

again to meddle with other people's money, and a strong feeling of love and reverence towards the kind parent that now and always softened reproof and punishment by her love and tenderness, Hugh went to bed and to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

MAGGIE AND HER MOTHER.

IT was Mrs. Frere's custom to sit with Maggie for half an hour every morning, as soon after breakfast as she could get free from her other manifold duties, and to read to her some portion of the Scriptures, and hear her little sick child say a hymn or two. This was nearly all the instruction that Maggie had hitherto received; for, partly in consequence of real illness, and partly from an indolent impression that it would be a great deal too much exertion for her to attempt to conquer difficulties, the poor child had learnt nothing except to read.

But she had now received a new impulse; and, though almost too proud to like to speak of her ignorance or of her desire for improvement, even to her mother, she now, though with some timidity, entered on the subject.

"Mamma," she said, "I want to learn something. I am as old as Pen, and I don't know how to do anything. I do not know as much as little Helen; hardly more than Constance."

"*It is true, my* child," replied Mrs. Frere; "but

you know, dear, you have not been able to learn; you have been too weak."

"I was too weak at one time, mamma; but I think I could do better now, and I mean to try very hard. Aunt Lucy says, mamma, that although I am so deformed and ugly, I might very much improve myself in mind, and that then people would not think about my looks so much, and besides she says that if I were interested in listening to conversation, and able to understand things I should not think about whether people were looking at me or not, and should forget to mind."

"What dear Aunt Lucy says is very true, my child, and I sincerely wish you could obtain some interest in intellectual employments; but I do not think she could have said you were ugly, darling? It is not like her to use such expressions; nor, indeed, is it true," replied Mrs. Frere.

"No, mamma, no, it was I that said *ugly*. She never says anything of the kind; but am I not ugly, mamma?" asked Maggie, eagerly catching at her mother's word of encouragement.

"Shall I tell you the truth, Maggie? All the truth?" asked her mother; "can you bear it, even if it is unpleasant?"

"Yes, mamma," replied Maggie, bravely; "I will not be cross. Indeed, dear mamma, I do mean to try to be a better girl, and let you tell me of my faults without being angry."

"Well, darling, that will be a step gained; and when you are told of a fault, you must consider whether it is with justice; and if you find that you are really wrong, confess it, and not try to convince yourself and others that you have not been in any *way to blame;* but now I must answer your ques-

tion. You are not ugly, Maggie, excepting when you put on that proud, repellent expression of countenance, for which I sometimes reprove you. When that look appears, it is most unpleasant, and may be called ugliness of the worst sort. At other times, when you allow yourself to appear as God has made you, you are by no means ugly or disagreeable looking. It is true that you are lame, and that your figure will probably be never otherwise than ungraceful. I will not tell you that this is of no consequence, my love; you would not believe me if I said so, for every one knows that a light and graceful figure, and movement, are great charms; but I can tell you, and with perfect truth, that it is very possible either to make people forget defects in outward appearance, by gentleness of spirit, and intelligence in conversation, or to greatly add to your own discomfort and that of others, by being yourself so absorbed in the recollection of those defects, and of their probable effect on the opinion of others as to keep the remembrance of them always before yourself and them. But my child, this is a low view to take of the subject. There is a point of view from which we should look at this trial, which will help you to bear it far better than any comfort that my opinion, or that of any other human being can give you. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yes, mother," replied Maggie; "that was what auntie said; she said that God knows all about it—all—everything. He knows how I hate to look so, and how I hate to go into the drawing-room, and let people see me; and He knows how much, how *very* much I wish to run about, and to be like other *children; and oh,* mamma, why won't He make me

well, when I have so begged Him to? I have begged and begged and cried, and I am sure He cannot love me, or else He would do it;" and as she thus spoke the poor little sufferer sobbed and cried in such agitation as to quite distress her mother.

"Hush, darling, hush;" she said, drawing the child towards her, and resting her head on her shoulders. "Be still and know that I am God." She added, after allowing a few moments for Maggie's agitation to subside, "Maggie, do you think I love Helen?" she asked.

"Yes, mamma, I am sure you do!" replied Maggie. "Why do you ask that?"

"You noticed when I came in this morning that I looked sad. I would not then tell you why it was, but now I will. Poor little Helen would not do as she was bid this morning. She was very naughty, and I found it necessary to punish her; she rebelled, and would neither do as I had told her, nor submit to her punishment, and, in consequence, I was obliged to shut her up in solitude, and forbid her coming downstairs to breakfast with the others. Then she 'begged and begged and cried,' and intreated me to release her, and excuse the punishment that I had laid on her. Should I have done so, Maggie!"

"No, mamma; I suppose not," replied Maggie. "Helen is so wilful, and so soon forgets, that if you had let her off, I suppose she would have been as naughty again to-morrow."

"Then you do not think that it was because I do not love your sister that I have left her still in confinement, or that I *liked* to punish her.

"No, dear mamma; I see, I see!" exclaimed *Maggie, eagerly;* "and that is what God is doing

to me. He knows that I am not the better for the trials he has sent me, and that I should be naughty and wicked if he let me get well."

"'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' Let that be your comfort, dear child," replied her mother. "It is not for me to say why God sees fit to lay this severe discipline on you; but He knows best, dear child, try to remember that. 'He does not afflict willingly!' He knows exactly what kind of discipline we need, and how much; and if He were to listen to our impatient cries, and take our trials from us before they have done the work they were sent to do in us, it would be much the same as if I were to have let Helen go downstairs, and amuse herself, and be free from all restraint, before I have reason to believe that she is sorry for her fault, and desirous of doing better."

"Then now, mamma, I do hope I shall be more patient; indeed, I will try to bear it all, and not ask God again to make me well, if you think it is wrong to do so," replied Maggie.

"No, my love; ask what you will. God is your Father. Go to Him freely, and ask for *all* you want. Do not be afraid to ask Him to cure you, only do not ask it without striving to feel in your heart as well as to say with your lips, 'not my will, but Thine be done.' So our dear Saviour prayed, and so all his suffering disciples should pray; but ask also for patience and faith, dear child; ask Him to teach you what is His will, and to give you grace to bear, and to do it, and you will then become able to endure all the trials and privations that it is His present appointment you should bear, and to endure it cheerfully."

"And now let us return to the subject on which we set out—what does my Maggie want to learn, and how are we to set about turning her into a learned young lady?"

"I should like to go into the schoolroom with the others, mamma, and learn all that they do," replied Maggie; "if it were not for Rachel; but I should be afraid with her; she is so cross. Could not you teach me, mamma?"

"I have not time to do much, my love," answered her mother; "but I will talk with papa about it, and see what can be done. I do not think you strong enough to undertake so much as you propose; but I do think that you might do something, and would be the better, and the happier for the effort. And now I must go; but I will leave my little girl a text to think of, 'Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.' You will find it in the sixth of Galatians, at the first verse. St. Paul there instructs us that Christians should look on the faults of others with love and meekness, and try to help them to get the better of those faults, remembering that we might be tempted to do the same or worse.

"Now I do not like the spirit that has grown up amongst all of my children towards Rachel. I do not say that she is not often to blame in her conduct towards you; but you should remember, dear Maggie, that she is the teacher whom your parents have set over you, and that she is your sister, and try both to obey her, and to love her. If you all, instead of setting yourselves against Rachel, were to look on her as one 'set in authority over you,' and to try to do your duty towards her, I think *she would find* less trouble in managing you, and

consequently there would be fewer quarrels; and if you tried to love her, and prayed for her, you would find it easier to obey. It is easy to find fault, and call names; but it is not easy to rule and teach a set of disobedient little children with temper and gentleness."

"We do not call names, mamma, do we?" said Maggie, surprised.

"Have not I heard of you calling your sister 'Tempest,' and 'Hurricane,' and 'Old Torment,' and other such names?" said Mrs. Frere.

Maggie coloured, and could not deny that she and Pen also often did so.

"I mean to try very hard if Rachel is cross, to be kind in return, mamma; and perhaps after the holidays, I may be able to go into the school-room. What you say is very true, but I never thought about it before. I mean that it cannot be easy to teach children at any time, and least of all when they are so naughty and wilful as we have been. Mamma," she added after a pause, "I am sorry now, but do you know I am afraid I have always rather tried to set Penly and Helen up against Rachel and to make them rebellious, than to try to help them to be good. And Pen minds what I say so much, that I know if I had not done so and had tried instead to get her to be more obedient and attentive instead of telling her, as I often have, that I would not obey if I were in her place; that Rachel had no right to order her about, and that it did not signify how she behaved; for no one could love Rachel or please her either, that Pen would not have so often been naughty."

"I have no doubt, dear, that it has been so," *replied her mother.* "God has given you influence

with your sisters, and you will have to answer to Him for the use you make of it."

"Yes, mother," replied Maggie; "but I have asked Him to forgive me for Christ's sake *all* that I have done amiss, and I hope he has; and then my faults about Rachel and Pen will have been forgiven. And I will try very much and pray to God to help me in future; and Pen says she will too, mamma, and then if we both do, I think you will not have to be vexed so often by quarrels in the school-room."

"I shall be glad if it is so, my love," replied Mrs. Frere, "and shall rejoice to see my Maggie become a steady little scholar and a loving little sister; and now I must go, and see how it fares with my poor Helen."

"Give me something to do, dear mother, before you go—some lesson to learn, and I will try to get it quite perfect before I see you again," said Margaret. And having, in compliance with her request, received a short and easy lesson in spelling, and another in tables to attain, the little girl settled herself cheerfully to her self-inflicted task, and Mrs. Frere went to see whether she might release her poor little prisoner. To her great comfort she found that solitude and consideration had proved effectual, and that Helen was now able to confess her fault and ask pardon; and was in consequence sent to the school-room to finish her lessons.

Happily for her, Lucy was for this morning in authority, and the sorrowful child who had lingered at the door dreading to encounter Rachel's stormy reproof, was comforted by being able to slip into her place unnoticed and unscolded; the teacher *being at the* moment too much absorbed in a book

that she was reading in the intervals between hearing lessons, to observe either her entrance or the whispering that ensued between her and Penelope, or even that Constance, instead of doing her sum, was amusing herself by making all sorts of grimaces and antics at her sisters.

CHAPTER XI.

DISCOVERY.

ON the Saturday after the fishing excursion that has been described, another was planned, Mr. Ellis having kindly promised to take his own boys and those from Merton Lodge, to a distant part of the river, and give Max some lessons in the management of his new rod. Both boys were delighted, for they were very fond of their uncle and cousins. Moreover, Max hoped for signal success, and to bring home a splendid show of fish; whilst Hugh had much satisfaction in the thought that John, whom he had not seen since the evening of his troubles, would be sure not to join them when they were with their Uncle, of whom he had a special dread. On this occasion they were to go above the town, in the exactly opposite direction to the scene of their former excursion.

As soon as dinner was over, the party set out in high glee. Mr. Frere was not able to go with them as it was market day, and a gentleman from the neighbourhood had appointed to call on him on *professional* business; he therefore stayed at home,

and Mrs. Frere and the girls, accompanied by the younger children, were to walk to a village at a little distance, and see some young friends.

Maggie, contrary to all former custom, but in pursuance of her newly-formed resolutions, would not allow her constant little friend Penly to stay with her. The walk in which she would otherwise join offered great temptation, as there were children at the house to which the rest were going, and a fine fruit garden, where they would most likely be allowed to gather strawberries and raspberries.

Pen, it must be confessed, was rather willing to be convinced that Maggie could do without her, though she very kindly pressed her sister to let her stay; but Maggie was magnanimous, and persisted in it that "Pen *should* go, and she should not mind," and so it was settled.

Maggie's heart swelled a little, and the tears rose to her eyes, when she saw them, all dressed in their pretty summer dresses, set out on their pleasant walk; but a loving kiss from each and a word of approval from her mother helped to cheer her, and she saw them all go with a pleasant smile, then went to her couch and her book in a shady part of the garden.

Maggie had possessed herself of a little easy book on botany that had been Rachel's, and Penly had gathered a variety of blossoms for her, in order that she might pick them to pieces, and try to find out the class and order of some of them. This was to be her amusement, and a very absorbing one it proved; for so intent was she on examining her flowers, that she was not aware of the approach of footsteps, and did not observe that her Aunt Lucy *and Emily* were standing close by her.

Her delight, when she became aware of their presence, was extreme; and she was greatly pleased when she found that Mrs. Ellis, knowing that she was to be alone, had brought Emily to stay with her for an hour, whilst she herself went into the town on some business.

"Oh that *is* nice, auntie," she exclaimed; "and then Millie can help me to find out about my flowers. I am going to try to learn things, auntie. I want to know a great deal, and, in truth, I know little enough now," she said, half-ashamed when she remembered how lately she had hitherto withstood all persuasion to make an attempt at learning.

"Oh yes," said Emily, "I will help you. I know a little, not much you know; but I daresay more than you do, because you have but just begun."

"Well then, I may leave you together now," said Mrs. Ellis, "and I will call for you as I go home, my dear."

Millie now took off her hat, and throwing herself on the grass by Maggie's couch, the two girls began their botanical studies with great interest, and diligently pursued them for some time. Then Emily asked Maggie what had made her so eager to learn.

"It is such a change, you see, that I cannot think what has made it," she said.

"Oh, I want to know things I should like to understand when people are talking, you know, Millie; and, besides, I shall never be able to walk about or play as the rest do, and it is so dull to have nothing to do. And there is another reason," *she added in a lower tone*, "It vexes mamma, and

papa to see me so dull and ignorant, and I want to please them."

"Yes," replied Emily, "I think that is quite right, and it *is* time you began to take pains."

"Millie," said Maggie, after a short silence, "do you think you could bear to be like me?"

Emily hesitated, began to reply, and then stopped, for she did not like to answer.

"Oh, do say what you were going to," entreated Maggie. "You would not like it, would you?"

"No," said Millie, "I should not."

"No, I knew you would not," said Maggie, with tears in her eyes; "to be so plain, and lame, and deformed. It is dreadful."

"Oh, I did not mean that," said Millie, eagerly. "I did not know you meant those things. I do not think I should mind *very* much, Maggie; not so much as you do. It must be bad, but I don't think I should mind so very much."

"Then you don't know anything about it," answered Maggie, crossly. "No one knows what it is, and no one pities me. But if you did not mean those things, what did you mean that you would not like to be like me in? What was it, Emily? I will have you tell me."

"I would rather not say, Maggie," replied Emily. "I misunderstood you, and we had better not say any more about it."

But Maggie would not be put off, she would be answered; and then Emily told her—

"I meant in temper and behaviour, Maggie. I do not want to be unkind; but you know you are so very cross and quarrelsome, and you do not consider the comfort of other people, or what they *like*. You are not a bit like my other cousins. I

should like to be like Max, or like Pen; but I should not like to be like you. I am sorry I said it, Maggie, I don't like to make you cry; but you know you made me tell."

Maggie was now crying sadly. She was rather angry, and also deeply grieved; and so she continued to cry, and Emily to try to soothe and comfort her. At last Maggie, whose anger was giving place to sorrow, put her arms round Emily's neck, and, resting her poor little weary head on her cousin's shoulders, she said—

"Millie, I know it's all true. I am very naughty and disagreeable, and I know it's all my own fault that no one loves me. But, indeed, I am trying to be less troublesome, and behave better; I am, indeed, Millie, and I mean never to be so selfish again. I know now that I must have God's help, as dear Aunt Lucy said. But I mean to ask for it every day, and all day long; and I have asked, Millie, and have had it, I know, many times. I asked God to-day to help me to let Pen go and leave me, and He did at once. I do hope I am going to be a good girl, and grow up to be a help and comfort to mamma."

Emily's tender and loving kiss was the only and the best reply she could make, and Maggie was comforted; and in a very short time all traces of tears had passed away, and the two little girls were again in good spirits and full chat, when Mrs. Ellis came to fetch her child, and wish Maggie good-night.

It was after nine when Max returned home alone from his fishing, having left Hugh with his uncle, as it had been agreed that he should return to "*The Elms*" with Mr. Ellis, to spend a few

days—a treat that all the young Freres enjoyed in turn once during the summer. He was in high spirits, having caught several fish, and having many wonderful exploits to narrate.

As he entered the house, a servant met him, and told him that he was to go at once to his father in the study. A little surprised at the summons, and not quite free from alarm, he threw down his cap and fishing-rod in the hall, and proceeded, with his basket of fish in his hand, to do as he had been directed. He entered the study, not with his usual cheerful step and bright countenance, and was not much surprised, though greatly disturbed, when, instead of the friendly greeting with which he was accustomed to be met, he encountered a grave and steady gaze from his father, and was told to put down his basket, and sit down on a chair to which Mr. Frere pointed.

"Where were you on Wednesday afternoon, Max?" asked Mr. Frere.

"We went fishing, papa," replied Max.

"Where did you go?"

"First we went to Grove Meadow, and then on to Fordham Bend," replied Max, with some hesitation, for the remembrance of all that had occurred that evening crossed his mind, and made him fear what his father would say next.

"Did you go anywhere else? into any house, I mean?" asked Mr. Frere, lookingly fixedly at his son.

Max coloured scarlet, demurred for a moment as to what he should answer, and then replied, "No, father;" but his whole look and manner was so unlike that of a boy who spoke the truth, that his father, with some sternness, exclaimed, "Speak the *truth, sir; do not* let me hear any falsehood. If

you did not go into any house, how came *this* on the ground in the parlour of 'The Angler's Rest'?" and, as he spoke, he produced from his pocket a handsome silver pencil-case that he had himself given to his son on his last birthday.

"And is not that your pocket-handkerchief?" he added, showing one that lay near him. "It has your name at full length on it, and was found also in the same room."

Mr. Frere then proceeded to tell his son that the landlord of the inn had called during the afternoon, telling him that he should have brought the things, which he supposed must belong to his young gentlemen, before, but that he could not conveniently come in till the market-day. That he had told him that two young gentlemen had come to his house, and had bread-and-cheese and ale; that the younger, whom the other had called Hugh, had been very unwilling to go in, but that the elder would make him, and said he would pay for both. That he should not have known who they were but for the mark in the handkerchief, "Max Edward Frere," and the letters "M. E. F." on the top of the pencil-case which agreed with that name; and as he knew Mr. Frere well, he had brought them to him.

"And now, Max," asked his father, "will you again say that you did not enter any house?"

"Indeed, I did not, father," said Max. "I wish Hugh was at home, and he would explain it."

"I do not see how Hugh could explain an act in which you evidently were the leader, a bit better than you can. I am ready to listen to anything you have to tell me; therefore, if you have any explanation to offer, you had better give it at once," *said Mr. Frere.*

"I have nothing to say, father," said Max, rather proudly. "You have never known me tell you an untruth, and I have not done so now. It is hard not to be believed on one's word."

"I should be very sorry to do you injustice, Max," replied Mr. Frere, "and I am grieved to be obliged now to doubt your word; for, in truth, I have always hitherto found you both true and trustworthy. But appearances are much against you. I gave you and Hugh my strict orders never to go into any public-house; nor even to accept ale or cider, if farmers should offer it to you. I also placed Hugh, as the younger, and as I believed the least steady of the two, under your guardianship and care, and bade him strictly obey you when you were out together. Can you not then see that I must feel deeply wounded and displeased, and that my confidence in you must be shaken, when I have reason to believe that you have disobeyed me yourself, and forced your younger brother into sharing your disobedience; and then refuse to give me any explanation of acts of which the testimony of these silent witnesses, the pencil and the handkerchief, accuse you?"

As Max made no reply, his father added—

"Go to your room, and consider this matter. Your supper shall be sent to you, as, after so much exertion, no doubt you are in want of food; but I do not wish you to join the rest of the family to-night. If you are disposed to offer explanation of or apology for what has passed, come to my dressing-room in the morning; but until I have had some satisfactory conversation with you, although I shall not confine you to your room, or exclude you from *the family circle*, you must consider yourself as

under my displeasure, and our intercourse must be limited to the mere necessary interchange of words that civility requires. Good-night, Max."

"Good-night, sir," replied Max, and went to his room.

He ate the food that was brought him by Nurse, whilst she stood by her darling "Master Max," and exhorted him to comply with his father's wishes, but all in vain; and then he went to bed, and when it was all dark, and there was no one to see, the poor boy's spirit gave way, and he sobbed and cried and bemoaned himself, until sleep overtook him, and he forgot all his sorrow.

CHAPTER XII.

MAX'S MISTAKE.

MAX was wrong. He ought to have told his father the whole story; but boys have a false code of honour, and feel that they must stand by each other, and that it would be unhandsome and unkind to tell those in authority of any fault that one of their companions has committed, even although duty to a parent should require it. Max had indeed promised Hugh that he would not tell of his misconduct unless he were asked, but he *was* asked. It is true that Mr. Frere put his inquiry in a manner that left his son free to withhold explanation without speaking an untruth, *had he asked him* whether Hugh had been at the

public-house, or whether he knew anything of the business, he would have felt himself obliged to tell the whole truth; but as the form in which Mr. Frere put the question only concerned his own presence at or absence from the forbidden place, his sense of right became confused, and he did not see how to clear himself without implicating others, and so made up his mind to endure his father's displeasure.

In this spirit Max fell asleep, and awoke in the same the next day. It was Sunday, and his brother being absent from home, Max had nothing to turn aside his thoughts from the painful subject which now engaged them. Before breakfast he sat down to prepare the Scripture lesson, and the portion of Greek Testament that he was expected to have ready against the afternoon, when Mr. Frere usually gave his sons an hour's instruction. His father's displeased and grave manner, when they met at prayers, and afterwards during the whole of breakfast, was very distressing to him, but, as he thought, there was no help for it, and he must bear it.

His mother was kind, but grave, and the rest of the family were much as usual in their manner towards him, excepting that they evidently saw there was something going on that made Max seem very uncomfortable, and of course their curiosity was somewhat raised. Rachel had been absent from home for two or three days, otherwise her sharp eye and penetrating mind would soon have detected what was going on. Max missed her, and felt very lonely. All went to church in the morning, and were engaged with their Sunday employments in the afternoon.

After the hour of Scriptural study, Mr. Frere usually took his boys a walk before their early tea, but this afternoon no walk was proposed, and Max took his Bible to a seat in the garden. After tea, all the elder ones again went to church—the little ones and Maggie, whose health did not allow of her going, being left at home under Nurse's care.

The sermon that Max heard that evening came home to his heart and conscience, and was the means under God's blessing of effecting a most important change not only in his present conduct, but in the whole tenor of his after-life. The text was from Jeremiah xvii. 9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" In depicting some of the different ways in which the heart of man is apt to deceive him, the clergyman said, "How often do we persuade ourselves that we are listening to the dictates of conscience, and following its leadings, that we are suffering for conscience sake, and occupying somewhat the position of martyrs for the truth, when in fact we are but following the dictates of pride and self-will? Did we carefully examine every step of the conduct which has led us into a painful position, we should but too often find that so far from its having been pleasing in God's sight, that it has been in direct opposition to the teaching of His holy word, and a mere indulgence of our own self-formed conceptions of what is due to the opinion of the world, and to our own dignity."

More was said, but Max heard it not. The thought fastened on his heart, "is it not so with me now?" He began to trace back the events of the previous Wednesday in his mind, and felt that *he had been* blameable in many ways. He then

thought over his conversation with his father, and for the first time since it occurred he began to doubt whether he ought not to have told him at once, when asked, all that had occurred. What grounds had he for refusing to give his father the explanation that he required? None whatever, but that he had foolishly promised both Hugh and John not to tell unless asked. Had he any right to have made such a promise, or was it not rather plainly his duty to have refused to do so, and told Hugh that he would leave it to him to confess his fault if he would agree to do so, but if not that he would not be accessory to a breach of his father's rules, but would himself tell him; admitting that Hugh's fault arose partly from his own neglect of duty? To all these questions the answer that conscience made was "*yes*."

Then arose another question—"you had promised not to tell unless asked, but were you *not* asked, and put into the position of either explaining, or disobeying and displeasing your father?"

Again the answer was "yes; and I did not choose to act as I felt was due to my father, because, as Mr. Grove truly says, I followed my own vile self-will and the dictates of pride, and *chose* to make a sort of martyr of myself; and here have I been priding myself all along on my noble conduct in thus bearing my father's displeasure, and enduring punishment for Hugh's sake, and all the time it has been a mere delusion!"

The sermon was over, the blessing given, and all the congregation had left the church. Max walked thoughtfully by his mother's side; his father had *left them*, or he would at once have asked for a

few moments' conversation, and have told him all that was passing in his mind.

It was Mr. Frere's custom to spend the time between the evening service and supper in his own study alone, and there, as soon as he got home, Max sought him. But he was not there, the study was empty, and Max was obliged to wait. Within half an hour, however, he heard the study-door open and close again, and his heart beat, for now he felt that the time had come; but it seemed more difficult now to go and tell his father than it had half an hour before. However, it was to be done, and Max was not the sort of boy to linger when his mind was made up. He therefore knocked at the study-door, and was told to come in.

As soon as he entered the room he began—"Father, I have come to tell you that I feel I was wrong last night in not telling you all that occurred on Wednesday. I am very sorry that I did not, and am ready to reply to any questions you like to ask."

"What has caused this change in your opinion, Max?" asked Mr. Frere.

"I am afraid, father, that I was doing as Mr. Grove said, and following my own pride, instead of my conscience," replied Max.

"I think you are probably in the right in so thinking, my dear boy," replied Mr. Frere. "Sit down, and tell me all that occurred on Wednesday afternoon."

Max complied, and gave a simple and true account of the whole business, not sparing himself, but as much as he could softening the matter for Hugh. He concluded by saying that he believed *his brother* to be very sorry for his fault, and to

have felt it very much, and begged that he might not be severely punished.

"I am sure he will not do so again, father, and I think he would have told you of his own accord as soon as you came home, if it had not been for his promise to John."

"I must deal with your brother as I think right, dear Max," replied Mr. Frere, "but I hope I shall find it as you say. One thing I have settled, he must not be with John Orwell: I fear he is a badly disposed boy, and will do no good to either of you. But you have not accounted for the circumstance of your pencil-case and handkerchief being found at the inn."

"The pencil-case I lent to Hugh at school in the morning, and I suppose he must have forgotten to return it, and by some accident dropped it where it was found; but I have no idea how the handkerchief came to be there. I had it by the river side I know, for I washed my hands in the river after I had been handling the trout that John caught, and wiped them in my handkerchief. I suppose either John or Hugh must have taken it in mistake."

That one of the others had taken it was true. John had done so, and finding it in his pocket at the inn, the thought suddenly occurred to him to throw it on the window seat and leave it there, in the hope that if anything was said about Hugh's having been at the inn, that would lead to the supposition that Max, and not he himself, had been his companion.

"And now, my son," said Mr. Frere, "I am truly glad that it has pleased God to open your eyes, and show you how deceitful has been the *workings of* your own heart, and to lead you to take

the right step and come to me with your confession. You came in good time, dear Max, for had you delayed an hour longer, you would not have had the comfort of showing me that it was a voluntary one.

"I was just going to send to you when you knocked at my door, to tell you that I had seen Hugh, and from him received the same explanation that you have now given me. I did not like to disturb the quiet of your uncle's house on the Sabbath, therefore waited until the evening to investigate Hugh's part in this business. I found him as you say, glad to have the opportunity of freeing his conscience from the load that oppressed it, by confession, and I believe he is truly sorry for his offence."

"Oh, father," exclaimed Max, "how thankful I am that I came at once, as soon as I saw that I ought to do so. I am sure Hugh is sorry, papa, and will not disobey again. I shall see him at school in the morning—may I tell him that you forgive him?"

"You will see him before the morning, my boy," replied Mr. Frere. You will find him in his own bed in your room. I could not, under the circumstances, allow him to remain at your uncle's to complete his visit, and therefore brought him home with me and sent him at once to bed. I shall wish it said in the morning that he has incurred your mother's and my displeasure, and that therefore he has been recalled from your uncle's; but I do not wish any mention made of the circumstances that have occurred. I shall speak to John Orwell, and try to bring him to a sense of his misconduct; but until I see him a very different boy from what he *now is, I must* forbid your having more communi-

cation with him than is necessary, and shall lay the same injunction on your brother. And remember, dear Max, though I do not wish you in any way to act as a spy on your younger brother, or to bring me tales of him; yet as my eldest son, and one on whom I wish to have dependence, and in whom in my frequent absences I expect to find a helper, I shall require it of you that you should watch carefully over Hugh, and if you see him disposed to go astray and cannot get him to listen to your remonstrance, that you at once come to me; and that you never, under any circumstance, pledge yourself to withhold information from me, that ought, for the well-being of your brother, to be communicated."

"Hugh and the boys will call me tell-tale, father, I am afraid," replied Max.

"Take care not to *be* a tale bearer, my boy; and then if they accuse you falsely, you must try to bear it and not mind. There is a great difference between a vexatious and self-satisfied showing up to authority of every foolish and boyish trick—a captious marking of petty offences for the purpose of repeating them, and the steady performance of the duty that is due from an elder brother towards the younger, the duty of endeavouring by every means, even that which is so painful to a schoolboy of *telling* those in authority, to prevent that younger from falling into sin, and doing that which may eventually lead him into bad courses. It requires much watchfulness and prayer to execute the office of elder brother aright; but if you ask teaching from God, and carefully follow the dictates of conscience, you will see your way and be able at the same time to help your brother, and to preserve *his warmest* affection. And now to supper."

The rest of the evening passed as usual. After supper, which was a pleasant and cheerful meal, they sang some psalms and hymns, and the day was closed with prayer. Max was very much relieved in mind; he felt that he was restored to his father's confidence, and was happy.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BROTHERS.

HUGH was not asleep when his brother went to his room, so Max sat down on the side of his bed and began to talk with him.

"Well, old boy," said he kindly, "I am sorry to find you here; but in truth I am heartily glad that the whole story has come out, and that there is no longer need to be afraid every ring at the bell and every time my father goes out and comes in, that he will have heard it from some one. Are you glad or sorry, Hugh?"

"Oh glad, very glad indeed," replied Hugh. "It's no trifle to lose my visit to my uncle's that I have so long hoped for; and I do not suppose that will be all. However, I declare I would rather be punished for a month than go through all I have endured since Wednesday. The load seems gone from my mind since I confessed all to papa."

"And so it does from mine," replied Max.

Hugh then asked his brother to tell him all par-

ticulars as to how it was found out, and what his father had said and he had answered, which Max did at length whilst he was undressing. He then knelt and said his prayers, not forgetting to thank God that he had given him strength to go to his father and tell him all; and praying that for the time to come he might act more in conformity to God's will.

When he was in bed he resumed the subject with his brother, and told him that he had made up his mind never again to conceal anything from his father, that he thought he ought to know.

"I do not mean, of course, that I shall go tattling to my father of every little dispute we may have, or any trifle; but if I know you wilfully break the rules that papa has laid down, or do anything that is morally wrong, such as last Wednesday's work, I shall not be made a party to it, Hugh. I do not want to be a tell-tale, but my father trusts me, and allows us to be together under the belief that I shall do my duty, and keep you out of mischief as well as myself; and I will not deceive him. He shall not find his confidence misplaced. I warn you thus beforehand, Hugh, that you may be prepared for the course of conduct I have decided on, and may know that if I do tell my father things which you would rather I did not, I do it from principle and not from unkindness."

"It will be better for me, Max, if you do as you say; for if I know that you will not be persuaded to keep anything wrong secret, I shall be less likely to yield to temptation," replied Hugh, "and I think you are right. But oh Max, John does sneer at me, and ridicule me so when I won't do what he wishes, that I cannot hold out against it; *and he puts things* to me in such a way, that they

seem for the moment to be less wrong than they really are."

"I don't know, Hugh," replied Max, thoughtfully; "but I think we always *do* know what is right and what is wrong when we honestly try to do so; and if we fully resolve that we will do right, and ask God to help us, as Mr. Grove said to-night, light and knowledge is given to us to see our way, and strength to walk in it. I have felt all through this business that I was not quite right in having agreed not to tell; and then in trying to make myself believe that when my father asked me, and even commanded me to speak and give him an explanation of circumstances, that I did wrong in obeying the letter of a foolish promise which bound me not to tell unless I were asked. Why I *was* asked and ought to have spoken out, and it was more pride than anything else that prevented me."

"Well, I think what you say is quite true," replied Hugh. "I know well enough that all John's arguments were trash and nonsense, and that what I had to do was to obey papa, and refuse to go into the inn, and wait patiently till I got home. I do think that we *can* find out what is right, always, only then I am afraid that I did not try or wish to do so. Certainly I did very wrong, and I have felt so all along; but not as I have to-night. Papa was so very kind, Max."

"He is kind always," replied Max, with enthusiasm. "There never were such parents as we have, and to think of doing anything against their wishes is too bad. But now Hugh we will go to sleep, and not talk any more to-night. I have had a sad day of it, and I hope to-morrow will be a *happier one.* Good-night, old fellow."

Hugh reciprocated the "good-night," and in five minutes both boys were sound asleep.

Before breakfast the next morning Hugh had a long conversation with his father; he then voluntarily confessed to him the whole transaction about the half-crown; and Mr. Frere seeing that his boy appeared truly penitent, forgave him his offences, and allowed him to join the family as usual. He however told him that from that day forward, he forbade both his sons from having any association with John Orwell than that which was absolutely necessary. "I wish I could entirely separate you from him, Hugh," he said; "his influence over your mind is not for good; but this I cannot do; whilst you both live in the same town, and go to the same school, you must occasionally meet; but I will not allow him to come to the house, nor will I permit him to join you in walking or fishing, or to be associated with you in any way that can be avoided. I shall see him myself, and tell him so; and mind, Hugh, that I expect to be obeyed. As to your money, you must make up your mind to lose it. I cannot allow you to ask John for it, and I do not expect that he will return it without asking."

"No, father," replied Hugh; "that is not likely; and, in fact, if I were to ask him, it would come to the same thing. John never has paid me back any money that I have lent him, though I never before let him have so much; but I knew when he made me fetch it for him, that I should never see a penny of it again."

"Well, my boy," replied his father; "you must take the loss, and when you find yourself less able than the rest to contribute to any little scheme that is on foot, you must remember that it is your own

folly and weakness that has caused you the inconvenience. Let the whole of that part of the business act as a reminder to you, that when you allow yourself to take one step in a wrong direction, you know not how many you will be induced to take, or to what evils and sorrows that first step may lead you."

Rachel was greatly surprised, on her return home, to find that Hugh was not at "The Elms," where he was to have stayed a week, and, of course, began an eager questioning of every one who came near her as to the cause of the change. She soon discovered that he had gone to his uncle's on Saturday, and been recalled on Sunday night, and the manner in which her questions were answered showed her plainly that his recall had been occasioned by the discovery of some fault that he had committed. Further than this she could discover nothing. Her parents would not explain the matter to her; Lucy and the younger ones could not; and Max—the only one, in fact, save Hugh himself, who knew anything about it—had been forbidden to speak of what had occurred.

But her restless curiosity and strong desire to have something to say or do in every event that took place in the family would not let her rest.

"Of course Aunt Lucy and Uncle Hugh *must* know!" thought she; and, as soon as she could contrive it, off she started to "The Elms," taking Pen and Helen as her companions. Poor Rachel! how much her eager desire to be one, if not chief, in everything misled her. She ought to have known that if her parents did not choose to tell her, and if the parties concerned, Max and Hugh, had been by *them desired* not to speak of what had passed,

that there must be some reason for their silence, and that it was her place to rest satisfied, and not to try to obtain information that they wished kept secret. Probably Rachel did know this, and her conscience no doubt told her that she ought not to endeavour to find out what they had not seen fit to tell her; but whether conscience spoke or not, she did not care; she had made up her mind to find out the whole of this matter, and nothing should hinder her from trying in every possible way to do so.

And she was successful, for her aunt, not knowing that Mr. and Mrs. Frere had refused to tell her, or wished that nothing should be said on the subject, at once began to lament that Hugh should have forfeited his visit, and by a few adroit questions Rachel soon contrived to draw out the particulars of the whole business from her aunt, much to the astonishment of the two little girls, who sat and listened to the sad details of their brother's misconduct, delighted at having discovered what they had before vainly sought to know, namely, the cause of Max's being evidently in some disgrace on Sunday, and of Hugh's sudden and unexpected return to Merton Lodge.

Having gratified her curiosity, Rachel now said that it was time to return home, and then, for the first time, remembered that Emily having been out, her two little sisters, instead of being in the garden with her, as she had intended they should be, whilst she talked with her aunt, had been seated in an oriel window, and must of course have heard all.

Angrily reproving them for what they, of course, *could not have* helped, and calling them "tiresome

little plagues, and always in the way," she warned them not to say to any one a word of what they had heard; which warning—as Rachel was neither loved nor respected by her little pupils—was, of course, wholly disregarded, or, in fact, acted rather as a stimulus to their giving full loose to their tongues, by showing them that what they had heard was meant to be a secret; and before an hour had elapsed after their return home, Pen had poured out all her budget of news into Maggie's ear, and Helen her's into Nurse's and Susan's, and the subject, which for good reasons Mr. Frere had wished should be unknown to all but the parties concerned, at once became the topic of discourse and comment in every room in the house; for Susan, not aware that it was a secret, talked of it to Mary, the housemaid, and Mary to Cook.

The children, having heard part of what their aunt said imperfectly, made one or two mistakes in the repetition, and so the story got about that both Max and Hugh had gone somewhere that papa had forbidden them to go, and had told great stories, and that papa had been very angry with Max, and sent him to bed, and had brought Hugh home from his uncle's to be punished. Maggie and Pen said it was "*horrible*, and they should not speak to such bad boys;" and Helen, who heard them say so, agreed that she would not either.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LITTLE REFORMERS.

AT tea, Hugh and Max, who, feeling themselves forgiven, and free from fear and danger, were now in bright spirits, and very happy, were greatly surprised to find their presence utterly ignored by the three little girls, who, steady in their resolution neither to speak to, or look at, "such bad boys," turned a deaf ear to any word that was addressed to either of them by either brother, neglected to hand the bread and butter to them, and in every respect behaved as if they had neither of them been at the table; except that the two elder ones looked at them from time to time with a sort of sad reproach in their countenances; and Helen, always aggressive and pert, every now and then made faces of scorn and reprobation, whenever she was looked at or spoken to by either.

Rachel, who saw all these demonstrations, and who alone had the least clue to their meaning, was in despair. It was in vain that she signed first to one, and then to the other, to conduct themselves differently, none of the young reformers chose to heed her, and the offensive bye-play went on, to the great annoyance of the brothers, who had not the least idea of what it all meant.

At last Mrs. Frere, seeing Penelope pass by Hugh *without handing* the plate of bread and butter to

him, and at the same time Helen making one of her scornful grimaces, and turning her back to Max, instead of passing his cup as he requested, began to observe what was going on, and asked what was the reason of such conduct.

"Penelope," she said, "what makes you neglect to hand the bread and butter to your brother? And you, Helen, what is the meaning of those impertinent looks?"

Penelope made no reply; but, in a rude and unwilling manner, pushed the plate towards Hugh; but Helen, "the audacious," as she was sometimes called in the family, answered, "They are bad boys; I don't want to have anything to do with people that tell heaps of wicked stories."

"I do not understand you, Helen," replied Mrs. Frere. "What do you mean by that?"

Helen only replied by a knowing look, and another grimace at Max, on which mamma bid her leave the table, and go to the nursery; and told Pen and Maggie that if they could not behave more properly they had better go too. This recalled the young ladies a little to order, and the rest of teatime passed quietly; though the annoyance of both boys at receiving such treatment, the anxiety of Rachel to restrain her little sisters, lest they should say anything that might betray her, and the spirit of insubordination which possessed Maggie and Pen, rendered the meal far from pleasant, and all were glad when it was over.

Mr. Frere had been absent during this scene, and was exceedingly disturbed when he heard from his wife of what had occurred.

"This is that meddlesome girl Rachel's doing!" *he exclaimed.* "I am sure one may well say of

her, as the Duke of Buckingham of Cardinal Wolsey:—

'No man's pie is freed
'From *her* ambitious finger!'

It is a pity that, with such fine qualities as she possesses, she should make herself so disagreeable to every one, and do so much mischief."

"But we have no proof that Rachel is concerned in this rebellion of the little ones," said her mother.

"I'll answer for it she is at the root of the matter," replied Mr. Frere. "I was rejoicing that she was absent when this business was brought to light, for she never rests until she has worried out everything—nor is contented unless she has some part to act, especially in the punishment of culprits."

"I sincerely wish that Rachel could go to school for a time," replied Mrs. Frere. "She is doing much harm to her little sisters by her mistaken mode of managing them, and the character of her mind is such as to make the amount of authority that she has unfortunately acquired in the family highly injurious to herself, as well as distressing to all the household. I wish we could send her to school for a couple of years."

"I have been thinking of it myself," replied Mr. Frere, "and as Lucy will soon be able to return home, Rachel might take her place. But what would you do without her?"

"That is the difficulty," answered Mrs. Frere. "My hands are full of work as it is, and I could not undertake the task of teaching altogether, in addition to other duties."

"Lucy ought to be able to relieve you of those *duties, or of* some of them," replied Mr. Frere.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Frere, "hereafter I hope she will; but you know she has been promised another half-year at school, and I think it's very important that she should remain there a little longer—amongst other reasons, for the sake of her health, which has certainly much improved since she was in that more bracing climate. But Lucy would not be the help to me that Rachel would be, if her impetuosity and other faults did not so materially interfere with her usefulness, for she is indolent, and has not the capability of teaching that her younger sister possesses."

Some days passed after this conversation, and Hugh and Max's adventures had passed out of the family subjects for thought and conversation. But the effects of the whole business, and especially of Mr. Grove's sermon, had not died out of Max's mind and heart. Lessons that he had received from his father's or his mother's lips, passages of Scripture that he had read, and parts of sermons that he had heard, all at the time without making any deep impression on his mind, now began to recur to his thoughts. The spirit of God "brought them to his remembrance," and taking of the things of Christ showed them unto him in a light in which he had never before viewed them, so that the rise and growth of grace in his heart became from that day marked, and his parents had the joy of hoping that at least one of their beloved children had entered that strait gate and narrow way that leadeth unto life.

His confirmation was soon to take place, and the instruction that he received from their good clergyman, in preparation for that solemn profession of *faith, all* tended to strengthen and confirm the

sacred influences that were at work within; and Max in after life was often heard to thank God for the events of this period, which had, by His blessing, been the means of leading him to Christ as our only Saviour.

In Maggie, too, a daily improvement might be traced. A new principle was at work within her, leading her to deny herself, to take up the cross, and follow Christ. And as the little girl strove to bear the cross thst was laid on her, strove manfully in God's strength, so did that cross become to her apprehensions lighter and lighter, and more and more bearable.

Rachel, on being questioned, confessed the means she had taken to gratify her curiosity; but, at the same time, strongly defended herself from the accusation of having indulged unjustifiable means of attaining the information.

"It was hard," she said, "that she should not know what passed in the family; she was always at home, and had the charge of the younger ones, and, of course, it was but right that she should not be kept in darkness," and much more of a similar import. "As to the little girls," she added, "it was not her fault that they had heard what her aunt said; she had told them that they were to go and play with Emily in the garden, whilst she talked with her aunt: they were always determined to put themselves in the way of hearing everything, tiresome little plagues."

Notwithstanding her vehement self-justification, she received a severe reprimand from her father for her meddlesome conduct. He took the opportunity of once more representing to her how injurious it *was to herself* and others, and of earnestly entreat-

ing her to consider what he said very seriously, and to strive to correct those faults which made her such an unwelcome teacher to her little sisters, and so unsatisfactory in her companionship with the elder branches of the family.

Rachel was much troubled at the displeasure of her father, to whom she was tenderly attached. She saw that she deserved it, and, for the time, resolved that she would strive to subdue her proud and self-reliant spirit, and to become more what he and her mother wished; but the poor girl's habits had been too long indulged to be easily conquered, and, moreover, she did not set about overcoming her pride in the right way, so that but little real improvement ensued. She continued active, industrious, and useful in the family, diligent in her own studies, and with unwearied activity carried on all the different employments she had taken on her, showing a wonderful capability for business, but destroying her own value in the house, as well as her own happiness, by her eager determination to regulate the conduct of others according to her own arbitrary decisions, and to spy out and punish every offence that she could detect.

We must now say a word or two about him who has figured largely in these pages, John Orwell. His mother was sister to Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Frere. She had married an Indian officer, and John had been born in Bombay, and sent home to England, with two little sisters, for education. He was boarded in the house of one of the head-masters of the school, a good man, who was anxious to do his duty to all the boys under his roof; but there are some boys who, go where they will, are found *untrustworthy*, and especially disposed to evil.

John was one of these. He wasa fine, handsome lad, clever and ambitious, and a very amusing companion, consequently he was very popular amongst his schoolfellows in general, and, notwithstanding his evil propensities, had a great many friends. There were a few of the more steady ones who had discovered his want of principle, and his frequent deviations from truth, and who would not be induced to associate much with him; but in great schools boys of all classes are much mixed up together, and it is a great mercy when the clever bad ones do not obtain the mastery of the better disposed boys, and so counteract the higher influence that the masters and parents are anxious to establish.

John was exceedingly nettled at being thwarted in his endeavours to draw Hugh Frere into his circle. He had vainly endeavoured to do so with Max, for Max was not only a little older than himself, but he was possessed of such firm and well-grounded principles, and so steadily attached to his parents, that it was hopeless for John to attempt bringing him down to his own level, or leading him into any scrape that might give him a hold over him. It was much the same with his other cousin, Charles Ellis, who was a boy of good steady principles, and remarkable for his truthfulness and steady obedience to all the masters as well as his parents.

With Hugh Frere, however, John had been but too successful. Hugh was a delicate boy, full of imagination and fancy, clever in a certain way, but not much disposed to study, and exceedingly fond of variety. He had considerable vanity, and *this John had* early discovered, and finding that

his young cousin was flattered by the attentions of a boy so much older than himself, and one so popular in the school, he made use of this knowledge to lead Hugh to seek his society rather than that of his brother, hoping thus to annoy Max, who was always watchful over his young and easily led brother, and greatly pained when he saw Hugh led astray by John's example and persuasion. Many troubles had resulted from this intimacy between Hugh and John, and it had ended, as we have seen, in Mr. Frere's forbidding all intercourse between the boys, except that general association in public that in boys of the same school, and even, as Max and John were, in the same form, could not be avoided.

CHAPTER XV.

HUGH'S ESCAPE.

A FEW days after the discovery of Hugh's transgression and John Orwell's share in it had been made, John, and Edward Dacre—a close intimate of his—were starting for a walk when they fell in with Hugh, who had been sent out on an errand, and happened to be alone and some way from home. When Hugh saw his cousin coming towards him, he suddenly stopped as if frightened, *and half turned* as if disposed to run away, but

seeing that both boys had observed him, he turned back again, and pressed forward as if in great haste, hoping to pass them at a run, and so avoid encountering the jests and taunts with which John had of late annoyed him.

But if he hoped so to escape it was in vain, for John, with a set purpose, and Edward Dacre, with schoolboy love of tormenting, both stretched out their arms and stopped him, as he ran at full speed against them.

"Why, where away so fast, Frere?" said Edward, holding him fast and laughing at the boy's struggles to escape; "one would think you were a courier, or express messenger, bearing news of life and death! 'Haste, post haste,' is written on every limb and feature."

"I want to get on; please let me go, Dacre," said Hugh, angrily; "what right have you to stop me?"

"Aye, what right, indeed?" said John. "A poor lad sees two ogres, or at any rate one, and his companion coming on to meet him, and sets out to run and escape the danger, and then, forsooth, you must pull him up that fashion. Never mind, Hugh," he added, "turn about, my lad, and come with us; we are going to see the hounds at Bendleigh's Common; come along!" And, linking his arm into Hugh's, he drew him round, and endeavoured to lead him on.

"No, John, I can't do that; you know I must not."

"Nonsense, boy! 'Must not' is for girls and milksops, and you are not either. Before I'd be such a 'Bessie,' and let myself be ruled by a brother *just a year or so* older than myself, and not half such

a clever chap, either! The old emperor is but a slow coach. Come, pick up your courage and brave the danger. We won't tell—will we, Ned?"

"No," replied Dacre; "come along, Frere, and never be afraid, old boy."

"I can't, I tell you," repeated Hugh; "I don't want to go, and I shan't. It 's not Max at all that hinders me. I shan't go, and I won't!" And suddenly breaking loose from his tormentors, the poor boy dashed off, and ran as fast as he could go homewards, thankful to have made his escape.

"What muffs those boys are!" said John; "they'll be afraid of their own shadows some day. Max, set up fellow that he is, with his 'Pa does not allow us,' and 'It's not *right!*' and all his fussy ways, he's a regular 'Molly-Coddle.' Hugh has twice his pluck, only he's kept down. I'd give a trifle to be even with them, and I will some of these days. You see if I don't," he added.

"Why, what's come over you, Orwell?" asked Dacre. "What have the Freres done to offend you?"

"Oh, never you mind," answered John; "only you see whether I don't serve them out before long, a couple of muffs."

"I do not think they are '*muffs*,' Orwell," replied Dacre. "There is not a boy of his age in the school that can beat Frere, major, in any of the games. See what a leaper and runner he is, and his batting is beautiful. He has plenty of courage, too. Do you remember his seizing that great dog by the neck that was worrying little Neal, and holding it until its master came up, and called off the beast?—and the child, whose clothes were on *fire, how bravely* he saved her at the expense of

his own hands and hair that were so burnt? I like Max Frere, and wish I were his friend."

"Oh, yes," replied John, "that's all true enough. I don't think he's a coward, only he keeps on about 'Pa,' and what he allows, at such a rate."

"Stuff, Jack. Max does no such thing. In the first place, he never says 'Pa' at all. He almost always says 'my Father!'"

"Yes, I know," answered John, cross at being thus driven from his ground. "My father! always the pronoun—'Father' is not grand enough for the emperor. It must be *my* father, and my mother, and my uncle, etc., etc., etc. Oh, he's a fine youth; but you see if pride does not have a fall before very long."

"Well," said Dacre, "never mind about that; let us talk of something else. I want to know whether anything is decided about the pic-nic yet, and when it is to come off, and where we are to go?"

Orwell happened to have heard some particulars of the promised holiday and pic-nic, that he was glad to communicate to his friend; and the two walked on pleasantly conversing together on this all-absorbing subject, until they reached the spot where the hounds were to meet, and nothing more was said of the Freres or their offences.

The next half-holiday was a pouring wet day. After dinner, the boys made an effort to get a walk, but it was so very wet and windy that they were obliged to give it up and go home. Mrs. Frere then insisted on an entire change of their streaming garments, and that neither of them should go out again that day; so they were obliged to make the best of it, and settle quietly with their sisters to *home* employments. In the winter, this was a cus-

tomary thing, and the boys, as well as the girls of the family, had plenty of home pursuits; but the summer had been a dry and fine one, and they would scarcely accept it as a fact that they were to settle down at home as if it were January.

Mrs. Frere had kindly given them the use of the dining-room, with permission to the young people to keep it to themselves for the afternoon, and do what they liked. All were therefore assembled there, with the exception of Hugh, and the two little ones. Hugh was in the study lying on the floor with his heels in the air, and his book on the ground—a picture of boy comfort. Connie and Frankie were at play together in the nursery.

"Well, girls," said Max, in rather a disconsolate tone, "what shall we do? I scarcely know what to set about, it is so long since we were kept at home. What are you so busy about, Rachel?" he asked.

Rachel had at once, according to her usual custom, seated herself without losing a minute, and was hard at work.

"I am working at my collar for mamma, Max, and if I do not work hard, it will not be done in time. As to you, Lu, I am satisfied that your cuffs will not be finished by the day! Do get your work, that's a dear child, and go on with it. It will be provoking, if my collar is done, and the cuffs to match it are not."

"I will, dear," replied Lucy. "I think I shall have it finished in time."

"I do not think you will," replied Rachel, looking at her sister's work as she took it from her box, and began to go on with the embroidery; "and if *you* have not, I shall not be able to help

you, for what with teaching the children, and all I have to do, I shall barely have time to finish my own."

"I will work steadily to-day," replied Lucy, "and get up early every morning, and work at it."

"We shall see what the getting up early will come to," said Rachel; "I would not give much for the time you will gain in that way."

Rachel's look and tone were provoking, but Lucy went on with her work without replying, and consequently no quarrelling ensued, as there would most surely if she had taken up the subject crossly. But with all her faults, Lucy was gentle and sweet in temper; she knew her defects, and that what Rachel had implied was very true, and contented herself with making a quiet resolution to conquer her lazy and indolent habits, and begin at once by getting up early and working at her cuffs until they were finished.

"Capital!" said Max with animation, "that puts me in mind of what I can do, and must do, too, unless I want to be behindhand on the birth-day. I must set about my text." And bringing out his colour-box and other implements, he began finishing off an illuminated text that he had made some progress with some time before.

"Suppose we take this opportunity of holding a council, and settling what mamma's present is to be," said Lucy. "Our general *bought* present I mean."

"Yes," replied Max; "it is time we settled about it, and we may not be altogether again just yet."

"But where is Hugh?" inquired Pen. "We *must not hold* the council without him."

"Ah, where *is* Hugh?" asked Max. "I have not seen him since we came home. It is not often that Sir Hugo and I are so long apart," he added, laughing.

"He is in the study," said little Helen. "Shall I go and fetch him?"

"Yes, do, fair Trojan," said Max. "Tell him that he is wanted, and that the household assembly waits his august presence to hold council on matters of state."

"Hugh!" shouted Helen, as she ran down the passage, and "Hugh!" she shouted again, as she bounced into the study, but no reply was vouchsafed her. "Hugh!" she again cried, standing at the door, and still no answer came from the recumbent figure that she saw lying on the ground under the window. But "Helen the Audacious" was not so to be defeated; walking gently up to her silent foe, she suddenly pounced on his book, and running off with a shout of laughter, sprang on the couch, and from the couch to the table, holding the book high above her head, and screaming with laughter and spirits, followed by Hugh, who, half angry and half amused, had sprung up from the ground and rushed after her, endeavouring to recover his book.

"Give it to me, Helen, give it up," he said, springing on the table after her.

But Helen was too nimble for him, and in an instant was off the table, and dashing along the passage with the book over her head, pursued by Hugh; and so flying and pursuing, the two rushed into the presence of the astonished "family council." Helen was foremost, and dropping the book, which was *no other* than the much discussed "Fairy

Tales," into Pen's lap, with the injunction, "hide it," which Pen quickly obeyed, she ensconced herself in a corner behind Lucy, whilst Hugh vainly attempted to get to her.

"Where's my book, Helen?" he said. "Max, make her give it up."

"I haven't your book!" said Helen, with sparkling eyes. "What do you mean? How should *I* have your book?" she asked, making a saucy grimace at him.

"Ah, I'll teach you better manners, miss!" he said merrily, for he was a good-tempered boy, and very fond of his little sister. "See what I will do to you next time I catch you! But now do give me my book, little worry that you are. Why can't you let a body alone?"

"Why," replied Helen, "I was thent to call you to a family counthil, and I called and called, and could not make you hear, tho what could I do? I wath obliged to make a thnath at your book, and then it was thuch fun to thee you sthare that I could not help going on, and having a run for it."

At the name of a family council, poor Hugh's countenance fell. Had Helen announced her errand in the study, he would not have come, for he well knew what the council was about, and how it would affect him.

Mrs. Frere's birthday was approaching, and it had always been the custom of her children to make a grand celebration in honour of it.

On that day Mr. Frere, who was somewhat of an horticulturalist, always gathered the best fruits that the garden produced, and all the best flowers were watched and hoarded to be culled in mamma's *honour.* The girls and boys usually clubbed their

carefully-saved pocket-money to buy some one nice present — something worth having — something that mamma had been heard to express admiration of and each child also prepared a little separate gift, the produce of his or her own skill and industry.

Hugh, of course, at once knew that the "counthil," as Helen called it, was called for the purpose of deciding on what the present should be, and seeing what funds they had at their disposal; and he, poor boy, knew that he could have no share in the purchase, as the birthday would occur within the month during which he was forbidden to spend any money. He also knew that no one except Max had heard of his sentence or its cause; and he did not at all like the idea of having to announce the position in which he stood, in full conclave, and of submitting to answer or evade the many questions that his refusing to contribute as usual to the family gift would be sure to call forth. It was of no use now for him to make his escape; he knew that the ordeal must be passed at some time or other, and therefore thought, as he was there, it as well to meet it at once.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FAMILY COUNCIL.

THEN Max stood up, and amidst peals of laughter from his amused auditors, delivered a *flowery speech*, full of fine words and flowing

periods, to the effect that "having been called to preside in that august assembly, he felt it his duty to point out the importance and difficulty of the subject on which they had to decide—important whether as it concerned the gratification of the taste and wishes of his honoured and beloved mother, or as it concerned the credit of those who were desirous to make a demonstration of their love and loyalty on the sublime occasion which the recurrence of her natal day afforded them." Much more he uttered in the same flowing style, and with abundant gesticulation; then suddenly changing his tone, he gravely and tenderly spoke of that mother's love—of her goodness, her gentleness and forbearance when they were any of them in fault, of her perfect justice towards them, "shown ever without partiality, without harshness, without one stain of selfishness." And here, when his heart was touched, Max showed that the true power of oratory was lodged in him. His words were true, simple, and well chosen; and more than one of his young auditors might have been seen hastily to brush away a glittering tear.

When his little speech was ended, he suggested that each one should say what she or he thought might be a suitable gift for their mother, beginning with the youngest—

"Miss Helen Frere," he added, bowing to the little lady in the corner, "be pleased to come forward and give your opinion on this matter."

Nothing loath was Helen to be the first speaker. She stood forward, and making a low curtsey, her eyes dancing with glee, announced—

"Then I should like it to be a beautiful large *brooch.*"

Helen's suggestion caused some merriment amongst the elders, which was greatly increased by Maggie and Pen who were next called on, and at once seconded Helen's opinion, with the addition that "it should be set all round with diamonds and have a large emerald in the middle, like Aunt Orwell's, that she brought from India."

Answers and laughter were pouring forth on all sides, at the suggestion and its supplement; but Max, as chairman, called to "order," and said that each one should give his or her opinions freely, and all comments be reserved for the end.

Hugh was the next appealed to; but to the astonishment of all, said that he could not have anything to do with the business.

Again comments and questions were beginning; but Max, who had before forgotten poor Hugh's difficulties, and now remembered them, turned them off by reminding them that no comments were to be made; "the honourable gentleman on my left hand will explain hereafter," he said. "Miss Rachel Frere, you are the next to speak; I, though next in age, as chairman, can give no opinion on the question, until I am relieved from my present responsibility."

Rachel suggested a book. "Mamma always likes a book."

Lucy, the next to speak, thought of a new butter dish, or a bread plate for the breakfast table.

Then Max summed up. "A brooch set with diamonds and emeralds, young ladies, would be a very pretty and distinguished gift indeed; but inasmuch as the article in question would cost a great *many more* pounds than we have shillings in

the world, I think we must at once negative the proposal."

"What does he mean by *negative?*" asked Pen in a whisper of Lucy.

"Decide against it, dear," replied Lucy. "It will not do. It would cost too much."

"The next suggestion is a book," continued Max; "the others which we have to consider are a bread plate and a butter glass. All these are admirable things; but though, perhaps, a little irregular, I think I must now offer my suggestion. I think my mother would like a really elegant flower vase, to take the place of that which was broken last winter. A book would be sure to please her; but perhaps we may not be able to fix on one that she would like, and so would either of the things Lucy suggests, only we have always made our birth-day gift to be something not for household use, but for her very own, and this, a flower vase would be."

Max's proposal was met by the approbation of all parties. A vase was fixed on, and a beauty it should be; the next thing was to decide how much money they could raise.

"Suppose we each of us elders give half-a-crown," said Lucy, "and Maggie and Pen each one shilling, and Helen sixpence; that will be four half-crowns."

"No," interrupted Hugh, "not four; I cannot help. You must do without me."

"We will settle about that by-and-by," said Max, who was very sorry for Hugh, and hoped to spare him vexation.

"No Max, thank you," said Hugh. "It is best to have it out at once. Mamma has forbidden me

to spend any money for a month—she was quite right, and I quite deserved it; but as her birth-day will come within the month, I am shut out from any share in the present."

"But what did you do, Hugh, to make mamma so angry? Was it that time you told stories?" said Helen.

"You have no business to inquire, Helen; and I wish you would not be so impertinent," replied Hugh, much annoyed.

But he need not have troubled himself to speak. "Hurricane" had seized on "the Audacious" as she was deservedly called, and put her out of the room, amidst a storm of thumps and tears from the angry child; and turning the lock on her, she came back and putting her arm round Hugh, whispered—

"Don't say any more. *I* will pay your subscription; the present shall not lose in goodness, and you shall have your share in it."

"No, that won't do, Rachel," whispered he—"thank you all the same. I must take the consequence of my faults; mamma will think it just the same if I spent your money as if I spent my own, and so I must be left out."

"Yes, I am afraid it would not be right; but I am so sorry for you, Hugh," whispered Rachel.

"What would be the price of a very nice tall vase?" asked Lucy. "It should be a tall one, and with some gold. Don't you think so?"

All agreed in this; and it was decided that the girls should go and look at some vases and inquire the prices, on the first fine day, and report to Max and the little girls; and that they should then see what funds were required, and how far they could *meet the demand.*

During the latter part of the discussion, all the young ones had resumed their employments, and were working hard at their various occupations—all of which were in preparation for the approaching festival. Hugh had fetched his pencils, and was very busy in copying a drawing in his very best style; and Pen and Maggie were both working book-markers—the one with beads, the other with silk. Helen, poor child, had been banished, and was at play with Connie and Frank in the nursery; but even she had a gift in preparation—a pincushion that she was making under nurse's directions; and Constance and Frank had each begun to plait three bright-coloured worsteds together into book strings, for the same purpose.

No one asked Hugh any questions, for they were all too kind to wish to give him pain; even Rachel was so sorry for the share she had had in his humiliation, by the results of her curiosity, that she was anxious that nothing should be said to add to his vexation. No one but Max knew the history of the stolen half-crown; but all supposed that the sentence not to spend any money for a month, was part of the punishment for the misconduct that they had heard of in part, and neither then nor afterwards was Hugh questioned on the subject.

The afternoon sped swiftly away, and great was their surprise when the warning bell rang to intimate to them that they were to prepare for tea. All had made considerable progress in their work, and agreed that the wet afternoon had been both pleasant and profitable to them.

There were at this time two very interesting and exciting topics of conversation afloat in the Frere *family, one* was exclusively their own, the other a

matter in which there were few households in the town who were not more or less interested and occupied. The private one, peculiar to themselves, was the great event of the birthday, and the consultations about it, and preparations for it. The other, that which concerned the public of Otterford and its neighbourhood, was a pic-nic—the same to which John Orwell formerly alluded. This pic-nic was an annual affair, and always took place a few days before the holidays. This year it was to be, if weather permitted, on the very next day after Mrs. Frere's birthday. Max and Hugh had greatly feared that it would have been fixed for that same day, and then either the birthday festivities must have been adjourned to another day, or the boys must have given up one or the other of the festivals. Happily the danger was averted. Dr. Norris, the head master, decided on the 5th of July, and as the birthday was on the 4th, all was right.

This pic-nic was for the grammar school boys only; no one but the members of the school, the master, tutors, and boys, both day and boarders, having anything to do with it. To prevent confusion and unsuitable mixture of classes, the head master was accustomed to appoint as captains a sufficient number of the best conducted lads, to divide the school into groups of twelve. Some of these were day scholars, and others boarders, a due proportion of them being the tradesmen's sons who attended the school, and the rest from the sons of the gentry.

Each captain had to form his own group of twelve, a work in which he was of course assisted by the suggestions of his friends. The usual plan

was for the captain to name two or three whom he wished to be associated with him, "enlisted under his banner" as it was termed, and then each of the chosen ones invited two or three of his friends and allies, until the twelve were made up of those who were friends, or at least had some acquaintance or connection with each other.

These "companies," as they soon got to be called—for the name of captain brought in other military ideas—were to mess together. They were to consult with each other, and their parents, and families, what should be taken as provisions for the day, and to supply themselves with food, and means of eating it. The captain was made responsible for the conduct of his company, much in the same way as monitors are for that of their forms at Rugby, and called on to report if any drinking or other improper conduct came under his notice. The tea was a public affair given by the head master, so that the companies had only to provide for dinner.

Max Frere was one of the captains. His "company" was to consist of his brother, the two Ellises, David and Charlie Scott, and six other boys, some of them friends of the Ellises and Scotts, and some of his own and Hugh's. It was a select party, for the Freres were great favourites in the school, and many were anxious to "enlist" under Max. Of course this mode of arrangement gave scope for much very pleasant consultation amongst the members of each company, and many chats about what they would take, how it should be carried, &c., &c.

The place decided on for the scene of operations this year was Otterbourne Castle, a very fine ruin, *about six* miles from Otterford. Some of the boys

were to walk, and others to go in omnibuses or other vehicles. Each company was to arrange for its own mode of conveyance. To manage the transit of boys and guests was one of the offices of the captains, each providing for his own company, and being purse-holder for all.

John Orwell was exceedingly angry when the names of the captains chosen by Dr. Norris were announced, and his was not found amongst them. This was a great offence; but, perhaps, even a greater was that Maximilian Frere's was. He had been brooding over the Freres' offences, or imagined offences, with a bitter hatred, from the time that his uncle had reproved him so severely for drawing Hugh into mischief, and this feeling had been kept up and enhanced by Max's avoidance of him and Hugh's resolute escape on the day that he refused to go with him and Dacre to see the hounds. This offence proved a climax, and both loudly to his friends and secretly in his heart he swore to be revenged on both Max and Hugh, calling the former "a sneak," "a talebearer," "a great sham," and other opprobrious names better not mentioned, and vituperating Hugh, his father, his mother, and all his family as a party of hypocrites, full of airs and assumption.

"They're as poor as church-mice, for all their pride and pretence," he said to Fulham, into whose smypathising ear he was pouring his complaints, "few servants, the girls acting governess, and the boys with such a pittance of allowance that is quite ridiculous. Poor beggars," he said, laughing, as he pulled out a handful of silver, amidst which shone more than one bit of gold, and, shaking it about in *his open hand*, added, "I wonder when the

emperor and Sir Hugo will show out like that?"

"Few boys in the school can show out like that, Jack," replied Fulham; "I wish I had one third part of your wealth."

"Well," answered John, consequentially, "I must say that the governor does not keep me short of tin; he's a brick for that; and grandpapa, too, is sure to tip me pretty high, when I honour him with a visit."

"So I suppose you 'honour him' pretty often?" asked Fulham, laughing.

"Pretty well," answered John; "but it's precious dull down at the Grange, I can tell you. Slow work playing good to please the old gentleman; so after I have been there a few days and got all I can, I find myself 'recalled to go on with my studies.' He believes any cram I tell him, and is 'so glad to hear that I stick to my books,' and 'hopes I shall be a credit to the family,' and then the horses are ordered to take me back, and a good tip—last time it was a fiver—is slipped into my hand, and off I go."

"Well, I wish I were you, Orwell; I'm short enough, I can tell you. I wish you'd lend me ten shillings or so? Do, there's a good fellow; I'm hard up as ever I can be, I am indeed."

"Very well," answered John, "so I will; only please bear in mind what a certain good book says, 'The borrower is servant to the lender.' Some day, when I want a turn of work done, I shall come to you."

"With all my heart," replied Tom Fulham; "I'm your man when you want a helping hand, and as to the money you shall be sure to have it

back when I get my next good tip, or, if that is not forthcoming, when I come back after the holidays; I shall be sure to have a good stock then."

"Who shall you enlist under?" asked Fulham.

"I don't care; I wouldn't go at all, if I had not a hope that somehow I may pay out Max Frere. It's a shame not to have made me a captain. Who shall you go with, Ful? Let us be together."

"Oh, yes, so we will," answered Fulham; "I think Frank Davenant is a captain. Shall we go with him?"

"Yes, I think so," replied Orwell; "he's not one of your very strict ones. Dr. Norris thinks him so, I know; but you and I know better," and the two boys laughed as boys are but too apt to laugh when they see a master deceived by a smooth and plausible fellow, and trusting where trust is not due.

CHAPTER XVII.

HUGH'S SECRET.

THE Frere household was full of business. The brothers and sisters had each and all petitioned Mrs. Frere to remit Hugh's punishment, and allow him to have the use of his money. It is probable that she guessed the reason of their being so anxious on the point, but she was steady in her refusal; and, indeed, the young supplicants had scarcely expected that it would be otherwise.

Mamma was known to be sparing in her punishments, and very sorry when obliged to inflict them, but once announced none was ever remitted, unless some before unknown circumstance came forward, which, placing the offence in a different light from that in which it had at first appeared, called for modifications, or remissions. Such was not now the case, and she refused to excuse it.

The present then had to be purchased without Hugh's help, and so it was agreed that each of the six who were to share in the purchase should add a little to their respective contribution, and so enable themselves to purchase a particularly beautiful vase, the price of which had been inquired, and found to be 12s. 6d. That important point being decided, and the vase hidden in a safe place until the day of presentation arrived, the young people were more at ease. The minor gifts were all in a fair state of forwardness, and Lucy had so far kept her resolution, and risen an hour earlier every morning, much to Rachel's astonishment, and to the benefit of her embroidery.

But there was a secret, a mystery extant, that even Rachel could not fathom. Max, Hugh, and Mr. Frere alone knew it. Every fine day Hugh went out at six o'clock, and stayed till half-past seven, coming in with a fresh colour, and an immense appetite; every wet day he spent this time in a shed, which had been fitted up for a workshop, and there Max often visited him; but whatever Hugh was doing, it was done with closed doors, and so seated that no one could see him from the little window.

It was a great feat for Hugh to get up every day *at five o'clock*, for he dearly loved his bed, but he

did it very regularly, and so found time to look over his lessons and complete his school-work, and yet have this hour and a half to spare for secret purposes.

Rachel was frantic to discover what was going on; she asked her mother, but Mrs. Frere did not know; then Lucy, Pen, and all the others were questioned, vainly though, for none knew, therefore none could tell. Max was adamant to her entreaties that he would tell her "in strictest confidence," and Mr. Frere laughed her out of countenance when she inquired of him, telling her that she was a regular "Mrs. Paul Pry," and then becoming grave, he gave her a serious lecture on the impropriety of endeavouring to coax or force a secret from any one who had, or was supposed to have, one in keeping.

"If you were meant to know, my dear, you would be told, and it is highly dishonourable to try to discover that which you know another wishes to keep secret."

"Oh, yes, papa," replied Rachel, blushing at his reproof; "I know it is in general wrong to do so; but this is only a little thing, a boy's secret, and it could not do any harm for me to know."

"You do not know what it is, my dear, whether little or great, and as to 'a boy's secret' it ought to be as much respected as a man's secret. 'Do unto others as you would they should do unto you,' is a rule I should like to see more frequently obeyed by you, Rachel. If you had any employment in hand that you wished to go on with unquestioned, would you not think it very hard if one of your sisters or brothers spared no trouble to find out what you *wished to keep* secret? You cannot, in this case,

fancy that it is imperative that you should know, lest it should be anything wrong that Hugh is doing, for I suppose my knowledge and sanction of his little secret is sufficient guarantee for that?"

"Oh, of course, papa; I know that, only it does seem so strange to have such secrets in families. I hate mysteries," replied Rachel.

"Do not have any then, my dear, and leave others to manage their own matters, if you please," replied her father. "Now come in to breakfast," added he, "and remember, Rachel, I strictly forbid your watching your brother, or making any further effort to find out what he is doing in the workshop, or where he goes before breakfast."

We however may know Hugh's secret.

On the evening of the wet Wednesday, when the "family council" was held, Hugh was observed to be very silent. He did not seem to be out of spirits, for a bright smile lit up his face every now and then as he sat at his drawing, but it seemed rather as if he were planning and maturing some pleasant scheme in his mind, than as if he were silent from depression. When asked what made him smile, he answered that "he did not know he had done so," and when asked what he was thinking about, he declined to tell. When Max and he were in their respective beds he opened his budget.

"Max, do you think it would be wrong, or breaking the intention of mamma's sentence," he asked, "if I could by any means *earn* a present for her against her birthday? I do not wish to do anything that she would not approve, but I can't bear to be left out altogether."

"I don't know, I am sure, Hugh," answered Max. "Tell me before I give an opinion what it

is that you think of doing. How can you possibly earn money between this and the 4th?"

"I don't want to earn *money*, I want to earn a present. If I earned money, you know, it would be mine, and I must not spend that more than any other money of my own; but if I earned a *thing*, I might do what I liked with it," replied Hugh.

"Is not that rather 'a distinction without a difference?'" asked Max.

Well, that is just what I am afraid of," replied Hugh; "that's the very thing on which I want your opinion; but I will tell you first what I think I might do. You know how kind Mr. Duncan is to us, and how much papa trusts him? I think if I were to tell him exactly how the case stands, that he would let me weed in his grounds, or do something, until I had earned the price of a nice geranium, and then let me have one in exchange for my work. What do you think of it? Don't say you think it would be wrong, emp.," he added, beseechingly. "I have planned it all so nicely, and so set my heart on it."

"It won't do, my dear fellow," said Max, decidedly, for his clear and sound sense of right at once shewed him the fallacy of his brother's plan. "It won't do; at least there is only one thing that could make it all right, and if you can get that it will be all straight enough."

"What's that?" asked Hugh, sitting up in bed in his eagerness.

"My father's consent. If he gives leave, there can be no harm done; but without his knowledge and leave, it would not do at all," replied Max.

"Good," replied Hugh. "What a help you are, Max. I *wish* I were as clear-headed as you are!"

"Why, Sir Hugh," replied Max, laughing, "I do not think 'clear-headedness' is the thing wanting. You saw as plainly as I did, that what you proposed was not quite the right thing; only inclination rather pulled conscience the wrong way."

"Yes, that is true," answered Hugh, "only that was not what I meant. I meant that your suggestion of asking papa's leave was so clever."

A loud rap at the door of their room, and Mr. Frere's voice calling out "Boys go to sleep, I cannot have so much chattering," startled them; but in a second Hugh was out of bed and the door opened in time for him to catch Mr. Frere, and drag him into the room.

"Oh do come in for a minute, papa," said Hugh, as he seized his father's hand, "I do so want to ask you something. It is something of great consequence—at least of great consequence to me."

"And therefore to me also, my boy. What greatly concerns you, greatly concerns me. Come, get into bed, and I will hear what you have to say," replied Mr. Frere, kindly. "No scrape, I hope?"

"No, father, nothing of the kind." And then Hugh told his tale; he reminded his father of his sentence and its cause—told him of the present for mamma that was in contemplation, and of the plan he had hit on for avoiding total discomfiture, and laid the case of conscience before him, ending with, "Now what do you say, Papa? will you give leave?"

"Yes, my boy," replied Mr. Frere. "Your plan involves some self-denial, and if you can carry *it out*, I will take the responsibility, on this one

occasion, of so far interfering with mamma's sentence; remember, it is not to be a precedent. You know what she says is law; but as this is a case in which she cannot speak for herself, as of course it would destroy the pleasure of your plan if it were named to her, I will for once do so."

"Then I may go to Mr. Duncan to-morrow?" asked Hugh, with a loving grasp of his father's hand. "How kind you are, papa! I will try never to displease you again, indeed I will."

"Try to keep a good conscience in the sight of God, my boy, and he will help you in the endeavour. You may go to Mr. Duncan's to-morrow, but I should like Max to go with you," said Mr. Frere.

"Oh, yes, father, certainly," answered Max. "We will go before school, Hugh, if you will get up in good time."

"Thank you, Max, I'll be up time enough; and papa, you'll keep it secret? You won't tell any one, will you? not mamma, nor the girls?" asked Hugh.

"I'll be silence itself, Hugh, and not whisper a word about it to boy or girl, not even to the cat or dog," answered Mr. Frere, laughing. "You know I am a lawyer, and lawyers are always close as wax about their clients' affairs; and now not another word to-night. Good night, and God bless you, my sons."

So saying, Mr. Frere left the room, and the boys, after mutual "good-night," settled to sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BUSY TIME.

MR. DUNCAN was a highly respectable man; the chief nursery gardener of the district. He was a client of Mr. Frere's, and felt under some degree of obligation to him for having taken more than usual trouble in the management of a very complicated and important cause some years before, which he had carried through successfully, and obtained a very satisfactory verdict for Mr. Duncan. During the course of the proceedings, Mr. Frere had seen much of Mr. Duncan, and had opportunities of observing the high tone of principle by which his whole conduct was regulated, and the very fine and intelligent character of his mind; and the two men, though in different positions of life, had conceived a high regard and respect for each other, and might be considered quite as friends. On many occasions Mr. Frere had found help in difficulty from consulting Mr. Duncan, whose shrewd Scotch sense and clear judgment were almost sure to help him to a right decision on any moral question; and in return Mr. Duncan was often cheered and supported under trials, of which he had had many and severe ones, by the kind sympathy and Christian advice and comforting of both Mr. and Mrs. Frere. The children all knew him well, and seldom it was that any of them paid a visit to Mr. Duncan's nurseries and green-houses without receiving the gift of some lovely rose or other flower.

The boys were early dressed, and set to work at once to complete their lessons, knowing that it was scarcely likely Mr. Duncan would be found in his garden before seven or eight o'clock.

As soon as they thought it reasonable however, they started on their expedition, and were lucky enough to meet him at the garden gate as he was entering. He was alone, and Hugh dashed at once into his story. He told it very fairly, only stating his sentence, and that it was a just one; but not feeling himself bound to tell the humiliating cause of that sentence, Max and he had agreed that he need not touch on so painful a point, as it did not concern Mr. Duncan to know it.

"Now, Mr. Duncan, do you think you could let me fix on a plant, and then in some way work out its price? I will weed, or dig, or water, or do anything you like to tell me," said Hugh, when he had finished stating his case.

"I do not know what to say to it, Master Hugh," replied Mr. Duncan. "No doubt I could find work for you, but does your father know of this plan?"

"Oh, yes," replied Max and Hugh both at once. "Papa gave me leave," added Hugh; "and I have so set my heart on it, Mr. Duncan. *Do* let me, will you?"

"Come in after school, young gentlemen, and I will then give you my answer. I must think about it. What time should you have to give me? You have all your lessons and school-work to do, you know, and examinations to look to before the holidays," said Mr. Duncan.

"Oh, yes, I know," replied Hugh. "I could *get up so as to* be here at six, and work till half-

past seven every day; and on Wednesdays and Saturdays I could come all the afternoons."

"Wet or dry, sir?" asked Mr. Duncan. "I think you could scarcely weed or work in the rain, and we have showery weather now; besides, have you counted the cost? Are you sure you could give up your play and your fishing, and all half-holiday sports for a fortnight? That is the time I think you said you had before you?"

"I suppose I must not work in the rain," said Hugh, "but as to the rest I should not mind one bit; and you know, Mr. Duncan, if you let me begin, even if I cannot earn enough for a fine plant, I might get enough for a little one, and indeed I will work my very best if you will let me try."

"I do not doubt it, my dear," replied Mr. Duncan. "However, I cannot settle it now—after school you shall have your answer."

Thanking Mr. Duncan for the kind hearing he had given them, the boys returned to breakfast. They found opportunity to tell Mr. Frere of their visit to the garden, and the appointment for after school; and then set off, books in hand, as fast as they could go.

In the interval between their two visits, Mr. Duncan found time to call on Mr. Frere, and ascertain from him what were his views on the subject.

"You really approve it, sir?" he asked.

"Perfectly," replied Mr. Frere. "Only mind the boy is really to *work* and earn his gift to his mother. There must be no play-work on his, or excusing on your part; let him fix on his plant, tell him the true price, and reckon his work as if he were a labouring man's son. It will do Hugh a great deal *of good* to learn to get up early, and to manage his

time. He is too dreamy and indolent by half; and if he has stability and self-denial to carry this thing fairly through, it will do him good for life. Keep a regular account of his time, and let him do his best. I should like to see how he works it out—the idea pleases me."

Under this sanction Mr. Duncan, when the boys came to him after school, agreed to Hugh's request.

Now, sir," he said, "I give my boys tenpence a day, and taking out two hours for meals, their day is ten hours long, that is at the rate of one penny an hour that I pay. But there is another little business besides weeding that I could employ you on, Master Hugh. I use a great many hundreds of little bits of wood like this, in marking my plants: if you like to cut some of these, you can do it on wet days, and at home. I give one penny a dozen for them, myself finding the wood."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Duncan," exclaimed Hugh, much delighted. I can cut those out famously; it's a great thing to have work that I can do at home, and be independent of the weather. I am so *much* obliged to you, Mr. Duncan. I shall come to morrow at six, if fine; and will you please leave word with some one what I am to do?"

"Come with me now, and I will show you a bed that you may weed," replied Mr. Duncan. He then led the way into a side path, and pointed out to him a bed of young trees that required weeding, told him where to throw the weeds when he left work, and then gave him a piece of wood and a pattern marker. "Now," said he, "come and choose your plant."

He took them through two or three houses, and made Hugh feel exceedingly puzzled how to choose

from such a galaxy of beauties; but it ended in his fixing on a magnificent white geranium, crowded with flowers in different stages of progress, and exceedingly lovely.

"I will try for that, Mr. Duncan," he said, "it is such a beauty, and is so exactly what mamma would like. Will you mind keeping it for me? You know I may at last not be able to get it, but I will try very hard, and I think I shall."

"Do not be afraid, Master Hugh. I will keep it for you, you may be sure, and I wish you success my dear boy;" and shaking hands with them both he left them to return home—Hugh with his blocks of wood under his arm, and both boys well pleased at the result of their visit.

"I wish I could have gone to work in the evenings as well as the mornings," said Hugh; "but you know they shut the gardens at six, so I could not."

"No," replied Max; "and you must remember too, that you have all your school work to do, and examinations to prepare for. And Hugh—I am so sorry to say it—but you know I must not help you! I would so gladly, and could help with the sticks; but it must be *your* work, not mine, you know?"

"Oh, yes," answered Hugh, gaily. "*I* know, old boy! But you will come and sit with me a little when I am at work sometimes, won't you? You see I must do it privately in the work-shed; and if you would come and work at something else, or even learn your lessons there, it would be much more jolly."

To this Max agreed, and steadily did Hugh work *both in the* garden and in the shed, until at last,

some two or three days before the birthday, he found himself free, and the happy possessor of the beautiful plant, which was, however, not to be brought home until the morning of the day in time to appear on the table at breakfast, with the rest of the gifts.

Whilst Hugh was thus busy with his self-imposed task, and both boys were full of work in preparation for the examination, much discussion was going on at intervals between the several "Captains" and the members of their "Companies," as to what should be provided by each boy in the way of food, etc., and what were to be the amusements of the day, how they were all to be conveyed to the scene of action, etc., etc., etc.—all points of the deepest interest to the parties concerned; and some of them points which were not decided without occasional clashing of interests, and consequent bitter heart-burnings and coolnesses between some of the parties concerned.

The place fixed on for the scene of the pic-nic was, as has before been said, a ruined castle, about six miles by the shortest way and seven by the road. The river ran in a pretty direct course from Otterford to Otterbourne, and some of the party were to go in boats. Only a limited number of these could, however, be obtained; and those captains who were lucky enough to apply first, had engaged all these—boating being in great request, and most of the boys anxious to secure that means of transit.

Max was amongst the first to apply for a good-sized one, whose owner he knew; and had thus secured it before Davenant, the captain under *whom* Orwell had enlisted, applied. There was

not another pleasure-boat in the place at all equal either in size or goodness to the "Fairy of Otterford," and of course Max and his party were very much pleased to have obtained the promise of it; and Davenant and his friends were as much annoyed at having failed to do so.

They, however, secured the next best. Neither of the boats would hold so many as twelve, the number in each company; half, therefore, of each party were to go in the boats, and to exchange on their return; those who went by water in going having to yield their places to the other half on returning—the boats were also to carry the provisions of their respective temporary owners.

The next point was, what were the provisions to be? In this, of course, each boy had to consult not only his captain but his parents, or whoever he depended on for the supply.

"What are you going to take, Max?" asked Maggie.

"We have not settled yet, Maggie," answered Max. "Charlie and Arnold are to take a roast duck, and some fruit and cream, and the Scotts some cold beef and a fruit pie. What had we better have, do you think, Rachel?"

"What do you say to a nice veal pie?" asked Rachel.

"Or a roasted fowl and some ham?" chimed in Pen.

"Or tongue," suggested Helen, as an amendment.

"I should say cold lamb and salad," said Lucy.

"And I should suggest a chicken pie," put in Maggie.

"You have fine spirited ideas of boys' require-

ments, young ladies," said Max, laughing. "I much doubt whether mamma would agree to the tongue, or even the ham—still less to roasted chicken or chicken pie! The veal pie that Rachel suggests would be prime, and not impossible, but I suspect some cold lamb or mutton, and some of our own lettuces, would be about the most likely for us to get. For my part I do not care what it is."

"No," said Hugh, who had hitherto been silent, "nor do I for myself, but I should like to have a good spread, and to do our share towards it handsomely. I don't want Jack Orwell, or his friend Fulham, to be casting up to us that papa is not so rich as their father, and so on."

"I don't care *that* for Jack Orwell's remarks, nor for those of any of his compeers and companions," said Max, snapping his fingers. "We are *not* rich, so if he says that it will be true enough; but mamma never lets us take shabby or unsuitable things when we have to take part in anything, and if Mr. John Orwell never did a more mean thing than we do, Hugh, I should be glad." He glanced at Hugh in evident reference to the borrowed half-crown, which both were sure would never be repaid.

Hugh only nodded acquiescence.

"If mamma gives us our choice, what shall we have, Max?" he asked.

"I incline to cold lamb and salad," answered Max. "The salad and vinegar will be so refreshing in the hot day, under those lovely trees where we shall dine. It will be perfection."

"And what will the other boys take?" asked Rachel.

"*Some* must take bread and cheese and cake.

Everything necessary for tea is provided from the farm at Dr. Norris's expense, but as we are to be on the field by nine o'clock, we think we shall want lunch as well as dinner, so, as a duck, some cold beef, and cold lamb, will not be enough for two meals for the twelve, some of the others must take some fruit, and also some pies and things. I should like to take either a cake or a pie, too, if mamma does not mind."

"And what are you to do all day?" inquired one of the girls.

"Oh, there will be cricket and football," replied Max, "and very likely we shall get up a paper chase. Then I reckon that there will be some sport with the boats. Having them there I dare say we shall race, and have capital fun. The river is so wide and safe there that we can do what we like. I mean to get a bath, too."

"And so shall I," said Hugh. "And there will be the ruins to explore, and the beautiful old wood to ramble in! How jolly it will be, Max. I wish the time were come!"

"You and I have a great deal to do, old fellow, before the time," said Max, laughing. "We can't afford to cut out a day of our time, can we?"

"Not an hour, not a minute," said Hugh, returning Max's merry glance. "Indeed, I must be off now. You are all so agreeable that you make me forget my work," and so saying, Hugh, with a shout and a leap, dashed out of the room, and away to his work-shed, whilst Max, following his example, betook himself to the study, and set to work diligently on the verses on which he was busy, and which he hoped would secure him the first Latin. *prize of his form.*

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH WAS THE COWARD?

MAX was very anxious to obtain this prize, and thought that he had a fair chance of doing so. The rival he most feared was his cousin John, who was in the same form, and was working hard for it, stimulated by the hopes of a gun which the uncle with whom he expected to spend the holidays had promised he would give him if he attained this school honour. He flattered himself that he should have a license also, and as he would be in Berkshire, where his uncle lived, all September, he was priding himself on the lots of partridges he should "bag," and boasting not a little of the grand career that lay before him.

"Do you think you are pretty sure of the prize, Jack?" asked Dacre, who having been lately moved into a higher form, was not himself a rival.

"It will be a race between Max Frere and myself," replied John, "but I think I shall beat the beggar. It will be as great a pleasure to defeat his imperial highness as even to get the prize or its attendant honour,—my gun—won't that be prime, Ned," he added, making a movement as if to bring a gun to his shoulder, and then shouting "*bang*"—won't it be fine, old boy?"

"I envy you the very thought of such a thing, Orwell," said Dacre. "What a lucky chap you *are to have* such an uncle. I do hope you won't

fail of the prize. I shall be sorry, though, for Max, he's a good fellow. What makes you and your cousins so unfriendly?" he asked. "I like them both, and cannot think why you are always trying to spite Max! Why will it be a greater pleasure to defeat him, than even to get the gun?"

John had been making signs of contempt and disgust whilst Dacre spoke, and when he waited for an answer, he burst out with an angry voice, "Because I hate them. At least I hate that fellow Max. Hugh would soon come round if it were not for him, but Max is a regular Pope. He is like his old namesake, and wants to add the title of *Pontifex Maximus* to his other dignities, or at any rate to execute its offices. I hate the fellow," he continued, "with his airs of goodness, and I'd give my right foot to give his pride a fall."

John had a good chance of the prize in question, for, though rather younger than Max, he was clever, and when for any reason he chose to exert himself and work hard, he showed high powers of mind. On this occasion he had put forth his best strength, and was certainly a formidable rival to have to contend with, and would have been more so, if his idle habits had not had so much power over him.

This conversation took place when a great number of the boys were together in the playground just before schooltime. Orwell and Dacre, as they talked, walked up to a group of the younger ones who were playing "hocky," several of the bigger boys watching the game. Hugh Frere was one of those engaged in playing, Max, Davenant, Scott, and others were looking on. In a loud and offensive tone, John Orwell called out—

"I say, Frere Minor, how much a day does Mr. Duncan pay his weeding boys?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Hugh, firing up and colouring scarlet. "What are you after now, I wonder?"

"I only asked a civil question," replied Orwell, with a sneering laugh. "What makes you so fiery, if I may venture to ask?" he added, tauntingly.

"I am more likely to answer your question," said young Duncan, who was one of the bye-standers. "How should Frere Minor know what my father pays his workpeople?" Duncan knew nothing of his father's engagement with Hugh, and was consequently much surprised at the question. "Are you thinking of seeking employment, Mr. Orwell?" he asked, laughing.

"Oh no, not I!" replied John; "I leave that to the titled gentry of the land. Sir Hugo can give a guess at my meaning, I fancy."

"You'd better let my brother alone, Orwell, I can tell you that," said Max Frere angrily. "It is but a cowardly thing always to be setting on a little boy as you do on Hugh, and I'll thank you to let him alone." As he spoke he pulled back Hugh, who was making angry demonstrations, and daring John to fight, and told him not to make himself ridiculous, by offering to fight a boy of John's size and age.

"Then come on yourself, if you won't let your brother try his hand on me," shouted John in a towering passion. "No, you won't! I expected as much. Cowardly! *I* cowardly. You're a coward yourself. You dare not fight me, for all *you're the bigger* boy!"

Max sprang eagerly forward, and began to pull off his jacket ready for the fight. Then he stopped, turned pale, and with downcast eyes said, "No, I will not fight." Then looking up, with a steady voice and grave look, he said, "I am not a coward, but I should show myself to be a moral coward if I allowed myself to be taunted into doing what I disapprove. I will never fight, and I tell you all so. It's a brutal habit, and I will not do it. I am no coward though, and if I have ever a chance I may prove it, and if not—well, I can't help it, but I will not fight."

He stood his ground, amidst the taunts of many, and the approving words of a few, who, though they might themselves not have been able to stand such an ordeal, had sense and principle enough to respect him who did so. "Now, gentlemen, you know my decision," he added, with some dignity, "and I trust I shall be able to stand by it."

At that moment the bell rang, and the whole party went into school.

How John had learnt Hugh's secret neither Max or he could divine, but that he had in some way found it out, at least in part, was evident.

"I think I know," said Hugh, when afterwards talking with Max about it; "he met me going into the garden one morning, and again coming out when I had been weeding, and was rather muddy; and once or twice when I was at work near the hedge I fancied I saw a face peeping through at me. I have no doubt he has watched me, and so found out."

"I daresay he has not really found out anything," replied Max. "It was a lucky guess, and *your colouring* up and getting so angry confirmed

him in it. I would not mind him, Hugh. You have not been doing anything wrong, and I would let him amuse himself with his nonsense if he likes. It is not worth minding."

"But I do mind," replied Hugh; "it is very disagreeable, and it's a shame too, for he brought me into the scrape. If he had not borrowed my half-crown, I should never have been in it. But why would you not fight, Max? You fought Dick Turner, and licked him, too, heartily, for all he was a year older than you, and a big fellow."

"That was different, Hugh," replied Max, earnestly. "Dick was beating a little fellow, and I did it in his defence; but I do not like fighting for anything, least of all when I am bullied and insulted on purpose to put me in a passion, and make me fight in revenge. I do not think it like what the Scriptures teach us,—'Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, vengeance is mine.' That came into my head, Hugh, just as I was going to accept his challenge and begin, and then I could not do it. It's my own look-out if I choose rather to suffer wrong than to fight, and I do choose it. You know I have enlisted under a captain whose laws forbid strife and quarrelling, and bid us 'seek peace and ensue it,' and I must obey orders, you know, whatever comes of it."

"Yes, Max, I know," replied Hugh; "but I don't think I could have done as you did, and I am afraid the boys will plague you finely."

"Perhaps so; but if they do I must bear it," said Max. "I don't like it, Hugh; but I don't see any way to avoid it, except by doing wrong, and so I must bear what comes."

When Mr. Frere heard what had passed in the playground, Max had the comfort of receiving his father's approval and encouragement.

"You are right, my boy," said he. "If you are required to fight in self-defence, or in the protection of others, do so, and fight heartily. You may do so with a good conscience in any cause on which you can ask God's help and blessing on the effort; but neither true manliness nor right Christian principles allow of fierce squabbles, and blows falling, on account of a word. The same principle that forbids duelling in men, forbids fighting in boys, and I would rather see my sons control their tempers and conquer themselves than see them give way to pride and temper, or give the offender a black eye or two, and disable him from his work for a day or two."

The next morning, on entering the playground, it must be owned with rather a failing heart, Max was joined by two or three of the boys of the sixth form, who shook hands with him in a pointed manner; and though he heard a few groans and hisses from some of the boys, and a low-toned utterance of the words "sneak," and "coward," a look or two from those who had so kindly constituted themselves his body-guard soon quelled the annoyance, and Max, taking no notice of the offenders, passed on into the schoolroom, and took his place as usual.

Hugh was not so fortunate. The boys of his form annoyed him sadly by sly hits about the weeding affairs, and also by remarks on Max's conduct the day before, and John Orwell and his allies gave him no rest whenever opportunity offered of throwing out offensive hints, so that Hugh was heartily

glad when school was over, and that, as it was a half holiday, he should be free from annoyance for the rest of the day, and, indeed, for the next day also, for that was the day of the grand family festival, and Hugh was to have a whole holiday. Max had declined it, as he was too eager about the prize to afford a whole day; but as Hugh was not going in for honours, he was glad to accept the offered holiday, and join with his sisters in the day's amusements.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BIRTHDAY.

THE morning of the 4th opened glowingly. It bid fair to be a hot day, but the morning was sweet and fresh, and the young people all assembled very early in the garden to gather and arrange the flowers and fruit for the breakfast; and then, when all was ready and the table laid, the presents were all clustered round their mother's usual place, a lovely bouquet laid on her plate, and the beautiful vase exquisitely dressed with geraniums and other choice flowers, a present from Mr. Duncan, placed in the middle of the table. Hugh made his appearance, his face beaming with delight, and bearing in his arms his splendid geranium, now fuller than ever with larger heads of flowers, and a perfect *picture of beauty.*

He set it down on a chair and said, "Where shall I put it? Did you ever see such a beauty?"

"Where *did* you get it?" "Oh, Hugh, where did that lovely thing come from?" were questions which, with many others, were poured out on the exulting boy.

"It's a present from Aunt Lucy," shouted Maggie.

"It's Uncle Hugh's present!" exclaimed Helen.

"No, it's papa's gift," said Rachel; "I know it is; Aunt Lucy and Uncle Hugh have sent other presents."

Pen was silent. She glanced triumphantly at Hugh, for she, and she alone of the young ones, with the exception of Max, knew anything about it.

All these, and many more guesses, had been advanced, and to each Hugh had shaken his head, and said, "Guess again."

"Did Mr. Duncan send it?" asked Lucy at last.

"Ah, you burn, Lu, you burn," laughed Hugh; "but you have not got the secret yet. Come, help me to find a nice place for it before mamma comes, and then, girls, go and fetch her. It is time, I am sure, and we are all ready now," he added, as he gave the treasured plant its last turn on the low stool close to mamma's chair, where Lucy and Max had helped him to arrange it. "Who are to be the ambassadors?" he asked.

"Lucy and Max," replied Rachel,—"the eldest daughter and the eldest son;" and with their arms linked round each other's waist the two danced off, and in a few minutes returned with the queen of the day. Everything on the table, from Mr. Frere's handsome gift to Connie's and Frankie's book-*strings, was* duly examined and admired, the lovely

flowers receiving their full share of praise. The beautiful geranium was greatly admired, and when he thought his turn had come, Hugh announced it as *his* gift.

A doubtful look from Mrs. Frere called forth an eager reply from Hugh. "It's all right, mother; I had papa's leave, and I earned it; I have not forgotten that the month was not over," he added, colouring.

"It is all right, mamma," said Mr. Frere, who had now joined the party; "now come into the other room and let us have prayers, and proceed to breakfast, and then Hugh shall tell us all about it."

Mrs. Frere was charmed with the lovely plant, and kissed and thanked her boy for his beautiful gift.

"I know, papa," said Pen, unable any longer to restrain her delight; "I have known for a long, long time!"

"And not told any one, Pen?" asked papa, laughing, "not even Maggie? Ah, I knew you could not keep it from Maggie!"

"I did, papa, I did," said the delighted child. "I promised Hugh that I would not, and I could not break my promise, you know, not even for Maggie."

"I am glad my little girl is so trustworthy," said Mr. Frere, "and knows the value of her promise," kissing her affectionately. "It is a great thing to be able to keep a secret, even from a dearest friend."

"And she did keep it very faithfully, papa," said Maggie, "for I never guessed until this moment that Pen knew anything about it, and we have so often wondered and wondered what Hugh could be *doing, and* Pen knew all the time and never said a

word. How she knew, and how he earned the plant, is still a mystery," she added.

"It is a mystery indeed," said Mrs. Frere, smiling; "I cannot guess, Hugh."

"One that I dare say will be cleared up at breakfast-time," said Mr. Frere; "but now, children, be still;" and taking Maggie and Pen each on one side of him, he led the way to the study, where family worship was usually conducted.

On their return to the breakfast-room, Hugh told them all how he had earned his plant, and also that Pen had suddenly come into the workshed one day soon after he began his task of cutting marks for Mr. Duncan, and seen what he was doing, and that he had, in consequence, been induced to take her into his confidence, and tell her all about it; "And a capital girl she has been," he added.

Rachel looked, and felt annoyed, that whilst she had so vainly striven to find out the secret, and had been forbidden by her father in a somewhat humiliating manner to prosecute her attempts at discovery, her little sister had known all about it, and had contrived to keep the secret from them all; but she soon cleared up, for gloomy looks she felt were out of place, and her good sense showed her that Hugh had a right to tell Pen if he chose; so she speedily put aside her displeasure, and fully entered into the chat that was going on.

Mr. Frere, who had seen the vexed look, was much pleased at the speedy passing away of the storm, and, as he caught her eye, gave her a pleasant nod and smile, in recognition of it. Rachel went round to where he sat, and, stooping down, kissed his forehead, and pressed the hand that he held out *to her.* No word was spoken, and no one seemed

to notice the passing caress; but Rachel treasured the kind look in her heart, and it helped her on her way.

Mrs. Frere was exceedingly gratified by Hugh's gift, and, drawing him aside after breakfast, she warmly embraced and kissed him, telling him how very much she was pleased by the steady and prolonged effort he had made. "Your beautiful plant will always not only remind me of my boy's love, but it will be a token to me that he has strength of mind to overcome indolence, and to fight against difficulties when he has a good object in view. Indeed, Hugh, I am *much* pleased."

They were now joined by one or two of the others.

"And are you not pleased with Pen, too, mamma?" asked Hugh, whose eye danced with delight at the affectionate approval of his mother; "was not she a good girl to keep my secret, even from Miss Mag?"

"She was, indeed, a very good girl," said Mrs. Frere, "and I dare say you were not a little proud of having it to keep," she added, taking Pen's hand and smiling.

"I think I was, indeed," said Pen; "I have always so wished to have a real secret to keep, not little nonsense things, but a real solemn secret; and now I've had one, and kept it too," she continued, looking unutterably dignified, "and I am so glad."

All laughed at Pen's self-congratulation, and then arose a discussion where the lovely plant should stand, and it was decided that at any rate, for the rest of the day, its place was in the drawing-room, and then that it would be best to consult Mr.

Duncan as to its ultimate place, whether it would be better in the greenhouse, or there.

At about twelve, accordingly, Hugh ran down to his garden, to advise with him on the subject, and after chatting with him a little, and receiving his instructions with regard to the management of his plant, he set off at full speed to return home. At a corner he came full tilt against a body of the school-boys, who had just left the playground. Amongst them were Orwell, Fulham, and Davenant.

"Hulloh! Whither away so fast, Sir Hugh?" said one of them, against whom he had run. "Why you almost knock the breath out of one's body. Give an account of yourself, sir."

Hugh answered with an apology that he had been at Mr. Duncan's, and was running home.

"Has your *master* paid you?" asked Orwell, with a sneer. "Come, let's see how much you have earned to-day—out with it?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Hugh, very much annoyed. "What are you after with your impertinence?"

"You know well enough what I mean," said John, laying hold of Hugh by the arm, as the boy tried to escape from his persecutors; "no running away, sir, till you have told us all about it. "Now then," he added, twisting Hugh round so as to face him, "I ask you again has your master paid you?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, John Orwell," said Hugh, burning with wrath; "you are a regular bully, and a cheat too," he added. "It would be a better thing to *earn* money than to borrow and not pay. I call that mean and dis*honest*," continued Hugh, working himself up into

a violent passion, and struggling in vain to free himself from his tyrant's hold.

"You do, sir, do you?" exclaimed John; "pray explain yourself. Who is it you mean to say is mean and dishonest?"

John little knew with whom he had to deal. He thought Hugh would have been afraid to say any more, now that he was in his power, and that he might bluster as much as he liked; but Hugh, when thus roused, feared nothing, and boldly answered:

"I mean *you*—you yourself—*you* borrow and don't pay, and you are mean and dishonest."

"There, sir, take that," said John, giving the boy a kick. "Don't say I don't pay my debts, and take that," he continued, lifting his hand to give him a blow.

But his arm was seized from behind, and a stern voice addressed him, saying, "What is all this about? Orwell, Frere junior, what is the meaning of this? Is it possible, Mr. Orwell, that a boy of your size can be kicking and beating one of Hugh Frere's age? and half a dozen of you standing by and not interfering?" added Dr. Norris—for he it was—looking round on the group with unmistakeable displeasure.

"He insulted me, sir," replied John, in a surly tone, but releasing Hugh.

"What did he say or do?" asked the Doctor, looking to one of the elder boys. "Let me hear your statement of the matter, Davenant, and you, Orwell, be silent."

Davenant then explained what had passed, stating that Frere minor had accused Orwell of borrowing money and not paying, and said that it *was mean* and dishonest.

Hugh, on being asked, said that he had done so, but that he had not spoken on the subject until John Orwell had attacked him.

"He bullied me, sir, till I was in a passion, and then I said it, and it was true, and he knows it."

A few questions addressed to the two disputants soon put Dr. Norris in possession of the truth.

He asked Hugh why he had lent Orwell money again, when he had found that former loans had not been repaid. Hugh was silent, and coloured deeply. Dr. Norris repeated the question.

"Because, sir, John had me in his power. I had done wrong, and he knew it, and I was afraid to refuse him the half-crown he asked me for. But I don't want the money again," he said, as John, with downcast looks, drew a half-crown from his pocket, and held it towards him. "Papa told me I was not to ask for it, and I did not, and I can't take it," he added, stepping hastily back, as if he thought the money would hurt him. "I don't want to have it, and I won't," he continued, as John held it towards him; "I only want him to let me alone, and not torment me about things that are no business of his, and that he has no right to ask me about."

"Take your money, Frere," said Dr. Norris; "it is but right you should have it, if it is due to you."

"No, sir, please not," said Hugh, protesting against it as one of the boys picked it up from the ground on which it had fallen, and offered it to him. "Papa would not be pleased. He said I was to put up with the loss, and I mustn't take it."

"*Does* your father then know the circumstances

under which Orwell borrowed it?" asked Dr. Norris.

"Yes, sir," answered Hugh; "I told him afterwards, and he forgave me for what I had done."

"Leave that money with me, then," said Dr. Norris; "I will arrange about that; and now go home, Frere;" and Hugh, with a thankful heart, obeyed him, making no sluggard's progress, for he rushed along the street, and in at the gate so fast as almost to overturn Pen, who was in the walk.

"Where is papa, Pen?" he asked, with scarcely enough breath to utter the words.

"He is with mamma in the study," replied Pen; "but what is the matter, Hugh? What has happened?"

Without staying to answer her, Hugh dashed into the study, and there to both parents recounted all that had passed, ending with, "I am very sorry, papa. I did not mean ever to have said a word about the money; but John baited me so, that I forgot myself. But you know I did not ask him for it, and I would not take it when he wanted to make me."

"What became of it then, Hugh?" asked Mr. Frere; "did John pocket it again?"

"No, father; I left it lying on the ground, till Dr. Norris told some one to take it up, and he would see about it. I hope you are not angry, papa? I would not for the world vex you or mamma to-day of all days. I am so sorry," and he took Mrs. Frere's hand, that was willingly surrendered to him, and began to caress it. "You are not vexed with me, dear mother?" he said, with tearful eyes.

"No, my boy," replied Mrs. Frere, "you had

some provocation, and you have done very right in coming straight to me to tell me the truth. But be careful, Hugh; do not let your temper get the better of you, even when justly angry. Remember 'He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.' Now go to Max, he is come in and was inquiring for you."

Hugh felt very thankful when Dr. Norris called in the afternoon, and told Mr. Frere of what had passed between the boys, that he had gone at once to his father; and, to tell the truth, he was not very much disturbed, when Mr. Frere, having heard Dr. Norris's statement, and received the half-crown, gave it back to Hugh, telling him that though he wished him not to ask John for it, yet, that as it was no more than just that John should pay his debts, Hugh was free to take the money.

The rest of the birthday passed very pleasantly. Mrs. Frere and the girls sat and worked in the garden, whilst the little ones played about in the shade; and in the evening the party from the Elms joined them, and all the boys and girls enjoyed a ramble by the river's side together, returning to a pleasant supper of fruits, cream, and cake, during which all the little events of the day were talked over, and the presents exhibited to their aunt and uncle, and cousins.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PIC-NIC.

THE next day was the one on which all hearts and tongues had been busy for so many weeks—the day of the pic-nic. Those who had never either witnessed such a festivity, nor had to take a share in the preparations for it, would hardly conceive of the excitement which prevailed amongst the boys, and their friends and relatives.

By nine o'clock, all were to be in Otterbourne Park; and the breakfasts in the morning were neither late nor lengthy. The "Captains" especially had to be ready very early, in order to see to the arrangements for their "Companies." Max and Hugh were busy enough; mamma, in honour of Max's captaincy, had provided not only the lamb and salad, but also a good-sized plum cake, and a fruit pie of suitable dimensions. Max had chosen his cousin Charlie Ellis as his "Lieutenant;" and it was agreed that Max and Hugh, the two Scotts, and two other boys, should go up the river to Otterbourne, whilst on the return, the other half of the company, with Charlie as head of the party, were to have the voyage, and Max, and those who had gone by water, were to return by land.

The pull up would be the hardest, as it was against stream. Mr. Frere had desired that the owner of the boat or his man should go with the boys; and a similar arrangement had been made for each boat—the masters and parents not con-

sidering it wise to leave the whole management of the boat and party to the excited youths. There had been a little demur amongst the boys about this, as they thought it somewhat *infra dig.*; but as the party consisted of little boys as well as big ones, it had been decided that it should be so.

Boys and hampers were soon on board, and the boat pushed off from the wharf. The "Fairy" took the lead; then followed the "Jenny Snell," in which were Davenant, Orwell, Fulham, and some of the others of Davenant's company. At the first starting, the man belonging to the boat was to steer, and Max and David Scott, and two others, to row. Similar arrangements were made in Davenant's boat—the other two, which followed in due order, were much smaller boats, each containing only four boys and an assistant.

It was a most exquisite morning, and the spirits of all were at the highest. The young oarsmen passed each other every now and then with shouts of triumph, to be in their turn caught up by the others. Then they sang, and shouted, and "hoorayed" like a set of wild boys; and laughed and "chaffed" each other in fine style.

The river was very lovely; on one side rose high red-sandstone cliffs, clothed with richly-varied thickets of wild flowers, and overhung with ashes, birches, and other lithe young trees; here and there rose a splendid beech or oak, and down along the edge of the water, the banks were all a-glow with the rich purple of the loose-strife, the yellow flag, varieties of the horse-tails, together with ferns in the greatest luxuriance, and other water-plants. Here and there were great islands of the yellow water-lily—"Brandy-bottles" as boys call them,

The Picnic.--P. 159.

their large green leaves and globular yellow blossoms floating on the surface of the water; whilst moor-hens and other water-birds, with now and then the variety of a water-rat, repeatedly called forth shouts of delight from the crews of the boats.

It was well there was a practised hand to steer, for the boys, even the steadiest, were wild with excitement and spirits, and would surely have come to grief if left to themselves.

When almost half-way to Otterbourne, David Scott's attention was drawn to the number and brilliancy of the insects just at the water's edge. "Look! do look!" he exclaimed, "look at the dragon-flies!"

And well he might call attention to them. Hovering over a bed of rushes, were hundreds of lovely little ethereal creatures, with bodies scarcely larger than a small pin—some of the most brilliant blue, others of the most vivid scarlet—all hovering as if suspended in the air; their gauzy wings vibrating so rapidly as to be invisible, as they hung poised over a flower, or glided from place to place. Amongst them were others of a larger size, with metallic-green bodies, and transparent wings clouded with black; and again another kind of a still larger size and more rapid flight, with their yellowish bodies flattened above and below, and most exquisite lace-like wings, appeared amongst them.

As they rested on their oars and watched them, they saw more than one trout or other fish leap from the water, and catch some unwary dragon-fly that had ventured too near the surface.

When anything of this kind occurred, the delight of the watchers was extreme; and even more so when they saw a bird of prey, probably a kestrel,

pounce on a poor little bird, and after striking it dead by a blow on the head with its beak, carry it off for food for its young.

"Oh, Frere," exclaimed David Scott, "do pull up to the shore"—Max was at the time at the helm—"do let me try for one of those beautiful red admirals; I do so much want a good specimen. Only look," he added; "there are no less than nine of the beautiful creatures on that one branch of oak! Do see how they open and close their wings in the sunshine! how early it is for them!"

Whilst he spoke, Max had turned the head of the boat across the stream, and was cautiously guiding her as near as he safely could to the shore.

"You had best give me the tiller, sir," said the man who was in charge of the boat; "I can put her in closer than you can."

Max gladly yielded it up, for he longed to try for one of the lovely butterflies to take home to Maggie, who had just begun to make a collection.

"Hi! look!" exclaimed one of the boys, "there's a fellow! What a beauty! I must have him," he shouted, as he pointed to a splendid Fritillary, which rose from the ground, and began to float along on the air up the river.

Max was standing by the side of the boat, which the man in charge had pushed into very shallow water, and leaning a little over endeavouring to catch the end of the branch of a tree, by means of which he hoped to have swung himself on to the bank of the river, that he might so get near the beautiful admiral butterflies.

Davenant's boat, which had lingered a little behind, had now come up with them, and John *Orwell,* who was steering, seeing his cousin's

position, quickly inserted the head of his boat between that in which Max was and the shore. In consequence of this manœuvre, "The Fairy" was pushed aside, and Max, who, as we have said, was leaning over, was thrown flat on his face into the midst of the reeds and shallow water over which he had been reaching. Though not, of course, in the least danger of drowning, he was, nevertheless, made both wet and dirty, and very unlike the spruce figure he would have wished to exhibit at the pic-nic. His light summer jacket and trousers were in a desperate state, and truth to say, poor Max, who was a little particular about his personal appearance, was very angry and rather cross.

It was an annoying thing, certainly, under any circumstances, but it was made the more so by a burst of laughter from each boat-load of boys. They saw that there was no danger, and boy-like could not resist a laugh at so absurd an accident. Max struggled to his feet as best he could, and looked round defiantly with a flushed face and angry eye.

"Never mind, Frere," said Scott, who had sprung on shore, and now gave him a hand to help him up the bank to the place where he stood. "Your jacket will soon be dry, and the mud will all brush off. As for you, sir," he said, turning to Orwell, who stood laughing in the other boat, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself — you did that on purpose."

"What right have you to say that?" replied Orwell. "I'll defy you to prove your words," he added; and in an insolent tone began to utter some very offensive expressions with regard both to Frere and Scott.

"I may not be able to '*prove* my words,'" replied Scott; "but for all that I will stand by them. I saw you, as you brought up the boat, signal to Fulham; and I knew you were up to some mischief, and you cannot deny it."

Some angry words followed, and several of the boys in both boats entered eagerly into the dispute; some saying that it was a shame of Orwell to play such a trick, others backing him up and inciting him to more insolence; but Max, who had now recovered his temper, exclaimed—

"Come, boys, we've had enough of this! whether Orwell meant to give me this ducking or not, we all know that his great sport of late has been to annoy me and my brother, and I wish him joy of his pleasant pursuit. However, he shan't spoil my day. Come along, Scott, and walk by the side of the river for a mile or so, till my clothes are dry."

So saying, he and Scott walked off, and the two boats proceeded on their way up the river.

When Max Frere and Scott rejoined the party, the proud owners of several beautiful butterflies, amongst which was one of the delicate and rare pale clouded yellow, Max's garments were dry, and his good humour restored; and by the time they landed at Otterbourne, he was ready to make a joke of his disaster and bear all the rallying of his companions at his disorderly appearance with a pleasant countenance and cheerful manner.

Meanwhile, Orwell's temper had not improved, for two or three of his party who were friends of the Freres, and who had plainly seen that he had pushed his boat in on purpose to overthrow his cousin, had been giving him a good set down, so *that* when he landed he walked off in a sulky

humour with his satellite, Fulham, and neither of those worthies was seen again for the next hour or more.

A bath was one of the first delights, and most welcome after the exercise, especially to those who had been rowing or walking. Dozens of boys at a time, swimming, diving, floating, or paddling, according to age and skill in watercraft, were in different parts of the river for the next hour or two. They swam races, dived for shillings, and enjoyed the water in every possible way. After the bathers had resumed their clothes, such of the boys who had been provident enough to bring luncheons, sat about in social groups, sharing their bread and cheese with those who had not made such provisions, and greatly rejoicing in the rest and refreshment, which, though it was yet early, their hasty breakfast and the exercise they had taken made them quite ready to enjoy.

The Freres had brought half their cake, cut ready in slices, and some pieces of bread and cheese in a little hand-basket, which was now produced, and found very acceptable; and after a sufficient time of rest and chat all were ready to start afresh in their pursuit of more active pleasure. Cricket, foot-ball, and other games, filled up the morning pleasantly for those who preferred them; others, who were collecting, wandered off into the woods to seek insects, birds' eggs, rare plants, or whatever their fancy led them to seek. Each "company" had fixed on a place and time at which they would assemble to dine, and in many instances two or three companies had agreed to unite their stores and mess together.

The *provision* baskets, each ticketed with its

owner's name, had been left under the charge of the men who had come up with the boats and carriages.

CHAPTER XXII.

A ROBBERY.

WE must now see how John Orwell had been amusing himself. When he left the boat and walked off with Fulham in such high dudgeon, he and his ally did not go far, but sat down in a little hollow by the river's side, and began to pelt some ducks that were paddling in the mud at the edge of the water. Meanwhile, the other boys had all rushed on shore, leaving the men to land their property and take care of it as they could, not at all anticipating any mischance.

As there was but one man to each boat, he had to moor his vessel, and get out all the baskets, etc., of which there were several (the boats and carriages, of course, being used to carry the baskets of the walkers, as well as of those who went by conveyances), and arrange them on the bank, carrying them afterwards to their store place.

A sudden thought struck Fulham, who was, as we have seen, quite ready to abet Orwell in any annoying attacks on the Freres.

"Let's get hold of their prog basket, and fresh

pack it for them," he said with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"How do you mean?" asked John.

"Don't you think they'd stare and think some magician had been at work, if they found their meat turned into mud, and their bread into stones?" he asked, laughing.

"Famous!" said John, catching the idea in an instant. "How shall we get hold of the right basket?"

"You go, and wait up there out of sight, and I'll go down and stand by Woods and watch him; when he takes up the basket with Frere's name on it, I'll give you a signal, and the moment he turns his back, after putting it down, do you slip out and carry it out of sight, then I'll join you and we'll have some fun. Mind, now, when I put my hand on my head, it's a hint that he has the right hamper."

"But if he should take up two at a time?" asked John; "there'll be no time to spare for reading directions."

"Which ever hand I put on my head, whether the right or left, the hamper in that hand will be the one," replied Fulham.

The plan was carried out successfully, and within a few minutes the two conspirators were chuckling over the possession of the desired basket and beginning to unpack it.

"I picked up this dainty down by the river!" said Fulham, holding up a dead rat by its hind leg. "Don't you think it will make a nice top dish for our friends?"

Orwell clapped his hands, and laughed so loud with delight at the mischievous design, that Fulham was obliged to call him to order, lest Woods, who

was not very far off, should hear them. They speedily, amidst bursts of smothered laughter, took out every edible thing from the hamper, wrapped up stones and other substitutes in the papers that had contained the cake, bread, pie, etc., and the rat carefully wrapped in the nice clean cloth in which Rachel had put the cold lamb, was placed on the top. Then they fastened the cover afresh, making it look as much as possible as it did before; and watching their opportunity, contrived to replace the basket on the spot where they had found it. Little did John Orwell think, when he placed that rat in the hamper, when, and under what circumstances, he should next see it!

"What shall we do with the poor devil's prog now we have got it?" asked John Orwell.

"Do with it?" replied Fulham; "why, eat it, to be sure! I shall make bold to take a slice of this cake, and recommend you to do the same," he added, taking out a pocket-knife, and cutting a great hunch from the half cake, the other half of which the Freres and their friends ate by the river-side a short time after; and giving it to John, he then cut a second and eat it himself; and it was not long before the two honest young gentlemen had devoured the whole.

"Now," said Fulham, "a glass of wine would be no unpleasant finish to that refection—where's your flask, Jack? I dare say you did not forget to fill it?"

On this hint, Orwell produced a pocket-flask which was full of wine, which he and Fulham soon emptied.

"Never mind," he said, "there's plenty in my *hamper,* and I shall fill it again at dinner-time.

By-the-bye, the lamb, and pie, and the lettuce will make a nice addition to our contribution, Ful, if we can hide it anywhere until dinner-time."

"Let us fetch our basket and put the things into them," said Fulham; "of course we have a right to open our own." So, walking boldly up to the man in charge, the two thieves, for such they were, coolly bore off their baskets, and having put in the stolen goods, returned them to the general store-place.

Before dinner, Max had a game of cricket, having agreed with some others to ramble in the woods afterwards. Each of the proposed party had some special end in view—Max wanted to look for some specimens of the "Herb Paris," for Rachel, who was a keen botanist, and he hoped to find it now in bloom; Scott wished to inspect some trees, the trunks of which he had sugared in the morning to see whether any moths or other insects had been attracted by the sweets; and those who had no such pursuit flattered themselves that they might find early nuts, or late wood strawberries, or at any rate see some stoats or squirrels, or other animals, to run or climb after. There is always something to find or do in a wood.

Hugh had been playing foot-ball, and was surprised when Max, who was the proud possessor of a watch, called him, saying that it was nearly two—the hour named for his company, and those who were united with them, to dine. He joined Max, and both boys were in great spirits; and in spite of their hearty luncheon of cake, etc., were also very hungry, and looking with much pleasure to the cold lamb and other delicacies awaiting them.

"How pleasant it has been, Emp," said Hugh; "*have you had a good game?*"

"Capital," replied Max; and the two brothers and some others who had joined them, walked towards the place were their provisions were stored, chatting merrily over the events of their respective games—who had "batted" well, and who had made "good innings," etc., as they went.

"These are the things of my company," said Max, seizing on a hamper, "and this is ours—Come and bear a hand, Hugh, for it's tolerably heavy."

Hugh obeyed, and each boy taking up something, they walked off to a pretty little glade in the wood, close to a rivulet, where they had agreed to dine, and began to unpack their goods.

Whooping, racing, and laughing, the large party of boys went forward, most of them carrying or helping to carry, something, and merrily the business of unpacking commenced.

"Now, Sir Hugo," said Max, "I'll take out the goods, and you act servitor, and carry them to the table (we can call the grass so if we choose, you know)." And so saying, he began to unfold the first parcel.

"I'm afraid they have not sent us much," he said, in a rather disappointed tone, as he undid the many folds of the cloth; "it feels very light." Why, what's this?" he shouted out, as the last fold fell aside, and he discovered the dainty his cousin had provided.

"What a shame!" he said, half angry and half laughing; "which of you fellows has played us this trick? I declare it is a shame;" and as one after another of the parcels was drawn out, and he saw dock leaves instead of lettuce, and stones and *gravel in* the place of fruit, pie, and cake, he and

Hugh growled aloud, whilst all the boys, who had gathered around them, roared with laughter, in which, after a minute, Max and Hugh heartily joined.

"Come now," said the former good-humouredly, when the laugh began to subside, "you've had your fun, now out with the things! We shall have worse than a 'Barmecides feast' if you don't! Out with our goods, Scott!" he added, seizing his friend by the collar, jokingly. "I know you are at the bottom of this," he continued laughing, for he fully supposed that it was a practical joke such as boys delight in playing on one another, and had no idea that he had to put up with a real loss.

Scott, however, and all the rest of the boys present, denied it, and in so frank and plain a manner, that the Freres at once saw that they really had had nothing to do with the business.

"I see," said Max, with considerable annoyance, "this is another of my good cousin's tricks and plans to annoy us—and a successful one this time, I must admit. It is a nice thing, certainly, for a *Captain* to have nothing but such as *this*," he added, kicking the offending quadruped to a distance, "to add to the commissariat!"

"Never heed it, Frere," said several of the boys.

"It is provoking enough for you," said Dacre, who was the captain of another company; "but you see there is plenty, enough for a dozen more than those who have to eat it; so come on and let be: never mind the fellow's spirit and malice!"

Max and Hugh accordingly accepted the annoyance as best they might, and sat down to partake of the good cheer so cordially pressed on them. Hugh was more discontented than his brother, for

he had a special desire, as we have seen, to produce a handsome contribution to "the spread," and he was not old or wise enough to feel that such ugly tricks always fall back on their perpetrators, and but seldom affect the character of those on whom they have been played.

An excellent dinner was eaten, with excellent appetite and great hilarity, by the thirty-six boys who had joined to provide and dispatch it, and enough left for a dozen more, notwithstanding the surreptitious withdrawal of the Freres' contribution. The attendants were then called to make themselves merry with the remainder of the banquet, and the boys all started off on their several ways, some to the woods, others to amuse themselves with games or with the boats.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LORD HAROLD'S TOWER.

THE evening had arrived, after a most agreeable afternoon had passed, and the public tea had been heartily enjoyed by the whole school. It had taken place in a pleasant orchard into which the farm-kitchen opened, and from that kitchen the supplies of boiling water and the other necessaries, comprising large jugs of milk, great bowls of Devonshire cream, immense quantities of home-baked

bread and fresh butter, poured forth without interruption until the whole party were satisfied.

During the afternoon John Orwell had been unusually well-behaved, refraining from all attempts to annoy the Freres, and, indeed, evidently rather taking up a friendly manner towards them. Nothing had been said to him, or in his presence, about the rifled hamper; and, though he was of course curious to know how their trick had been taken, neither he nor Fulham could venture to ask anything about it. Max wisely thought that, as he had no proof of John's having any hand in the business, he had better not accuse him of it; and, in fact, all the boys felt that to let the matter fall dead to the ground without notice would be a more effectual way of mortifying the tricksters than any amount of discussion and reprobation of the trick would afford.

The hour of departure for home drew near, and the boys, having almost exhausted their round of amusements, were sitting about in groups chatting. Many of them had explored the ruins in the morning; but the Freres, Orwell, and a great number of the others, had been too busily engaged in other pursuits to find time for it. Now, however, they bethought them of filling up the time that remained by a ramble through them. This was easy to effect so far as the ground floor was in question, but there was no access to the upper chambers—the stairs being wholly broken away—still, though several of the rooms were in a state of much dilapidation, there was very tempting ground for exploration, if they were once attained.

"I would not give a straw just to go over the lower *part*," said Max Frere, as they stood near the

old walls, with a number of boys who had collected together. "I should like to spy about the upper rooms, and see what they are like."

"So should I, Frere," said Dacre, who was one of the party. "What things have happened in those rooms, I dare say! Is it not said that King Charles I. held the castle against his amiable Parliament?"

"Not exactly that," replied one of the boys, "though it certainly stood a siege in the Parliamentary War; but it was besieged and taken for Charles by Prince Maurice, and it is the Prince who, it is said, slept here."

"I should like to go up and see the rooms," said Scott, "particularly the part that they call 'Lord Harold's tower,' that the country people say is haunted. I should think we might manage it."

Several of the other boys echoed this wish, and various speculations were soon on foot as to the height of the walls, and the possibility of gaining access to that especial part of the ruins.

"How high is that window from the ground, should you say, Orwell?" asked one of them.

"Well, I should say not much short of twenty five feet," replied John.

"Why, it's thirty, if it's an inch," said Dacre. "I wish we could get up and drop a line; you'd soon see that it is not short of thirty feet."

"But it's a smooth wall, and there's no climbing it," said Orwell.

"Don't you think we could find some lower window that we could get up to, and so round through that breach in the wall?" said David Scott.

On this suggestion, the boys all started up, and *began to* examine the ruins on every side, in the

hope of finding some way of access to Lord Harold's tower; but in vain. There was one part of the wall, on the opposite side of the castle from the turret, by which, if they had a ladder, they might have contrived, with a good deal of climbing, to get there; but without one it was impossible, as the window by which they must enter was fourteen or fifteen feet from the ground, and the wall was too flat for them to climb without that help.

"Once at the window, we could get access, I know," said Davenant, who was one of the group. "You see the wall is pretty good there," pointing to a part that was connected with the turret, "and we might scramble over that part where the ivy is, and over the corner, and so into the turret. I wish we could just get up, and I've no fear for the rest."

"I should like to have a scramble over the old walls," said Max; "I wish we had a ladder."

"So do I," said several of the boys at once.

"I know!" exclaimed Orwell. "I saw a ladder —and a good long one too—down in the farm-yard; we'll make bold to borrow that." And off he started, followed by two or three other boys, amongst whom were Max and Hugh.

They ran with a will, and soon reached the place where the ladder in question hung; and two of them were quickly in possession of it, and on their way to the castle.

"Let us borrow that rope also," said Max; "it may help us at a pinch. If we 'rope' ourselves at any difficult pass, as Alpine travellers do, we may be able to get along more safely."

He had taken possession of the coil of rope, and said this as he ran on with the rest after the others.

In a very few minutes the ladder was placed, and

one after another the boys ascended, and soon found a good landing-place within the window, and began carefully to make their way, one by one, round the broken walls towards the desired point.

Soon more boys joined them, and in a short time from twenty to thirty of them were swarming up and down the ladder, and in and out of the window; some of them fully satisfied with the amusement of doing so, and not troubling themselves with antiquarian lore, whilst others were far on their way to Lord Harold's tower, or busy searching out all the more accessible parts of the ruins.

The castle had been of strong masonry and very extensive; parts had crumbled into dust and rubbish, but there were several portions of the building that were comparatively well preserved. The "captains" had forbidden any of the smaller boys to mount the ladder; and the elder ones, who were either climbing about it or investigating the ruins, were members of three or four different "companies" who had been associated together in the amusements of the afternoon. Most of the younger boys were amusing themselves together under the conduct of one or two of the masters, and at a distance.

Max was the first to reach Lord Harold's tower, and was soon followed by Hugh and several others. This turret was almost complete; at any rate, one stone-floored cell was so, and a part of an adjoining one was in fair preservation. The ivy had grown luxuriantly on three sides of the tower, and hung in massive bunches through the windows, and even trailed on the rough stonework of the floor. There was no part of the roof remaining, and the height of the cell from the ground was considerable.

"*A pleasant* place to live in!" said Hugh.

"Pleasant enough," answered Max, "if it were comfortably fitted up, for there's a noble view over the park. Look! there are the young ones leaping for a prize. Oh, Hugh, why don't you go and join them? You are such a good leaper."

"I am above age," replied Hugh, who was rather proud of being "past twelve years old;" "it's only the little chaps that are to leap. But there, Max, look away there! do you see the Doctor and all the big-wigs down at the farm, having their tea? They look like a parcel of rooks in a turnip-field."

"Come, old boy," said Max, "come along, and let's try to make out something of the plan of the castle. Papa will like to hear our ideas on the subject."

They were just starting on this expedition, when a large party of the other boys arrived at the turret, amongst whom were Fulham and John Orwell, and they all stood together at the window for a time, discussing the controverted subject of its height from the ground. Several of them had chosen to bet on the question, and Dacre—who had collected all the twine and cord the boys had about them, and tied it together—next fastened a stone to the end, let it down from the window to the ground, and then cutting off the spare cord, dropped the end, and most of the boys set off to go down the ladder and be present at the measurement. Fulham did not go with them, and he and Davenant and some others remained looking out of the window. As Orwell was going, Max saw him pass a slip of paper into Fulham's hand, who read it, and nodded in reply. John then went away, and the others soon followed him, excepting the Freres, who set off on their tour of investigation. They

had not gone far, when rounding a corner they met Fulham alone, who asked where they were going, and then said—"Have you seen the owl's nest?"

"No—where?" replied Max, eagerly; "where is there one, Fulham?"

"I have not seen it myself; but if you can get over to that bunch of ivy," he said, pointing to a part of the ruin, quite at the opposite side from that at which the ladder stood, "you will find it, I daresay."

The boys, eager to see the nest, started off towards the point indicated, and Fulham, with mischief in his smile, hurried off in the opposite direction, muttering—"You're caught, my fine fellows; there are more owls in the world than those that live in nests."

Almost all the boys, having got tired of rambling about the old place, had departed. Davenant and one or two others only stayed on the ladder, and on the wall by it, waiting for Fulham. "Are they all gone down except ourselves?" asked one of them.

"Yes, all, I believe," replied Dacre. "Let's give a whoop of recall, in case any of them should be lingering behind," said Davenant; and raising their voices they all together uttered a loud shout; but there was no answer, and after waiting a few minutes, the whole party ran down the ladder, making all sorts of gambols with each other as they went, and then seizing it between two of them carried it off to the farm where it belonged, and, putting it in its place, ran down and joined the rest of the boys, who were now getting into the boats and carriages to go home, several parties of walkers having already set out on their homeward way.

Meanwhile Max and Hugh were working their way round to the place indicated by Fulham as that where the owl's nest was to be seen. It was a work of some difficulty, and in consequence of the broken state of the walls, they had several long circuits to make before they could reach it. When at last they got there, no owl's nest could they find. After wasting a good deal of time, Max exclaimed, "What blockheads we were to let ourselves be trapped so, Hugh! This is a trick of that fellow Fulham; and if we had but thought a little, we might have been pretty sure that we should find no nest here, for if any of the boys had found one, they would have been sure enough to carry it off with them."

"Most likely," said Hugh, "at least any of Fulham's set would, I'll answer for it; but had we not better go down now, Max? I've a notion it's getting towards eight, and we were to start at that time."

"True," said Max, looking at his watch; "why, Hugh, it is after eight now. Make haste along, old fellow;" and setting off as fast as the incumbrances permitted, they made for the window where the ladder had stood, and soon reached it. Their dismay when they saw that it was gone was extreme.

"What are we to do, Hugh?" said Max, who was foremost and first discovered its withdrawal; "the ladder is gone, and there goes one of the boats; I can see it going down the river: we are left behind."

Hugh now arrived at the window, and stood aghast at their position.

"That's another trick of Orwell's," said Hugh,

angrily; "I'll answer for it that it's his doing, and we shall have to stay here all night!"

"No, no," replied Max; "I don't think that; come back to the turret, Hugh; we shall see better from thence what is going on, and perhaps we shall make some of them hear us. Come quickly;" and both boys pushed their way across to the Harold tower as fast as they could go.

When there, however, they saw nothing to reassure them. On the river were all the boats, the nearest at some distance off, and on the road were two or three carriages, all rolling homewards at a good pace, crowded with boys inside and out. There were still two or three of the head boys, and a master near the farm, who seemed as if just about to start forward on their walk to Otterford, by the lanes. To these both boys shouted as loud as they could, and waved their handkerchiefs and caps, but all in vain. They were not heard nor seen, and they had the mortification of seeing them set forward on their way, and soon disappear behind a hedge, and with that sight their last hope of release died out.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE NET WHICH HE HID IS HIS OWN FOOT TAKEN.

"PLEASANT this," said Max.

"It's Jack's doings," insisted Hugh; "I have not a doubt of it; he's been at us all day, doing everything he could to make it disagreeable. He said he would be revenged on us, and this is the way he's chosen."

"It may be so," replied Max; "but I can hardly think it. However, Hugh, we had better not stand here without having another look about us. There may be some way of getting to the ground, even now, that we have overlooked."

"Could we not get down with the rope, Max?" asked Hugh, with a sudden lighting up of countenance at the gleam of hope that he thought it offered.

"Impossible," replied Max. "The rope is not above twelve feet long, and the lowest practicable place is full sixteen from the ground. Nor is there any place to tie the rope to. It cannot be done, and we must just make up our minds to stay here all night, unless they should miss us, and send back to release us, and that is most unlikely."

"No chance of that," said Hugh, mournfully; "you see those in boats will think we are gone by land, and *vice versâ*, and there is not a chance of their missing us; but we won't stay here, Max," he added; "there's a nicer place down there where the ivy shelters it; let us go there."

"We won't settle anywhere just yet," replied Max; "there may even now be some way by which we may scramble down and get out;" and so saying he walked on, followed by Hugh, and began a thorough investigation of the place, with the view of discovering if it were so.

"I wish we had some supper, if we are to stay all night," said Hugh.

"I wish we had," replied his brother; "but you see we had a capital tea, and the nights are but short; so that even if we cannot get out now —of which I have not quite lost all hope—we shall, I dare say, before breakfast-time; for when the men go to work we shall be sure to make them hear, and they will bring back the ladder; so it's not such a desperate thing, even if we have to stay."

"If it were not that they will be all so anxious at home," he added, "I should think it rather fun to stay here."

As they talked, the two boys were slowly working their way round to the place Hugh had pointed out. Hugh was a little in advance, when a bit of fresh-looking paper, folded together like a note, drew Max's attention, as it lay a little on one side of the mass of rubbish they were scrambling over, and he took it up and read in a hand he well knew—

"Send off the F's on some wild-goose chase, and then come down quickly and secure the ladder; I shall be safe down first; but I do not want to show myself.—J. O."

As Max perused this document, he fancied he heard a groan, and at the same moment Hugh stopped suddenly, and with a startled look exclaimed—

"Listen, Max! Did you hear that?"

"I heard something, Hugh," replied his brother; and as he spoke the groan was repeated, and a voice scarcely audible—but certainly a human voice—was heard crying for "help."

The voice sounded as if at a considerable distance, and both boys thought it came from a corner of the ruin somewhat to the right of where they stood, and in a direct line from Harold's Tower to the window where the ladder had been, and thither they hastened. At first they could see no one; but the voice which called aloud for help, as its owner heard their steps advancing towards him, soon guided them to the right spot.

They stood themselves on a corner of what had probably been the floor of the grand saloon; part of it had given way, and fallen in, leaving great gaps through which they could look down into a lower chamber. At the part near where they stood the inner wall had crumbled, and the greater part, and with it a portion of the roof, had, on some former occasion, fallen inwards, part of it remaining in a heap raised above their heads, and part having forced its way through the flooring of the room, and fallen in immense masses of stone and rubbish, which now rested on the broken floor of the lower apartment. Between this heap and the boys still stood a portion of the wall, varying from two to four feet in height, and clothed with the long grass and herbage that usually springs up amidst old ruins when they are exposed to the influences of the weather. There was also some ivy trailing over the walls, and at a little distance from them were two or three stunted old elder-trees that had *sprung up* and rooted themselves in the chinks.

between the stonework. Below this wall ran a narrow ledge, from which the flooring had broken away, and this afforded a scanty footing. On the other side of this wall, just under the ledge and prostrate on the top of the heap of rubbish which had fallen below it, lay John Orwell. Part of the wall just above where he was, seemed to have newly fallen, for the ivy and weeds were broken away, and it was easy to guess that John, having for some reason or other got on the wall, part of it had given way with him, and thrown him down on the other side.

"Why, Orwell, how in the world did you get there?" asked Max; "we thought you were a mile on your way home by this time. What's the matter, man? Are you hurt, Jack?" he added, in a kinder tone, as John turned himself from them, and uttered a groan and exclamation of pain.

"Hurt," he replied; "I think I am too. If you were lying here with that great stone on your leg, you would not take it so easily, I suspect."

In a second, Max, forgetting all John's injurious conduct towards himself, had swung himself over the wall, and was making his way to the spot where he lay.

"Don't go, Max," shouted Hugh; "it isn't safe. You'll be down," he screamed out, as he saw Max seeming to stumble. "Let him lie there: he does not deserve that we should help him."

"For shame, Hugh," said Max. "Think of what you are saying; you can't mean that."

Hugh looked ashamed, and as he saw his brother trying to move the fragment of the wall that rested on John's foot, and heard the groans of the sufferer

as he did so, he too began to cross the wall with the view of rendering help,

"Stay where you are, Hugh," said Max; "it is not very safe here, and you can be of more use where you are. Run back to the tower for the rope; be quick, that's a good fellow." Then as Hugh started off he said to John, "Try to bear it a few minutes longer, Jack; I cannot help you till I have the rope, but then I think I shall be able."

"Do be as quick as you can, Frere," said the suffering boy; "you won't bear malice, Max? You won't go away and leave me in this agony, will you? I'll give you any money, or do anything in the world for you, if you'll help me."

"You need not be afraid, Orwell," said Max, with some gravity; "I will do all I can for you, but it will be no easy work to get you freed from the stone, and clear of your predicament. The stones are so unsteady," he added, as one of them gave way under his feet, and rolled off, striking from point to point, and at last falling with a heavy sound on the ground below. "It would be useless to attempt doing anything until I can get something to hold by. Keep still, John. There's Hugh with the rope, and now I must leave you for a minute, but I will be as quick as possible."

Carefully retracing his steps, and steadying himself by the wall as he crept along the narrow pathway, Max reached the low part of the wall that he had before crossed, and began to make his preparations. Fastening the rope round one of the stoutest elder bushes, he passed the other end over the wall near the part where John lay; then going over the wall again, he crept up to his old position, and tied

the end of rope that was lying ready for him round his body.

Then he stood quite still a moment, and bowed his head in his hands in silent prayer. He felt that he had a perilous work before him; but he knew where to seek help and strength for it, and, having cast all his care on Him who ever heareth the cry of His people, he turned to his work with a bright and fearless look.

"Don't attempt to move him, Max," entreated Hugh; "it is so very dangerous for you, and it will not hurt him to lie where he is, any more than anywhere else. Do come back, Max."

"He must be moved, Hugh; you would not have me leave him with the stone on his crushed foot? No, that I am sure you would not," he added, "and besides, Hugh," he continued in a low tone, "the stones he is on are not steady, and I much fear more of these will fall and carry him down with them. Don't discourage me, dear old boy. Pray for me instead, and if it frightens you to look on, kneel down there behind the wall and ask God to take care of us, and give me strength to do what is necessary; but for the world don't call out to me, or scream. It might startle me, and I *must* be steady and calm."

This conversation had taken place in a low tone across the wall, and out of John's hearing. Then Max, supported by the rope, which did good service, began carefully to lift off the stone that rested on John's foot. This he happily accomplished without dislodging any of the rest. He then made him lay hold of the rope—which he loosened from his body *for the purpose*, meanwhile steadying himself by *holding tight* to the ledge—and so raised himself to

his feet. When John was standing on the one uninjured foot, Max resumed the rope, and, stooping in front of his cousin, made him get on his back; then slowly, and with great caution, he crept along the narrow ledge, holding by the wall, to a spot where it was low enough for him to seat John on it.

"Now, Hugh, lend him your shoulder to turn and get down, and he is safe," exclaimed Max, joyously. "Thank God for that; I hardly thought I should have got through it. Now, out of the way," he continued, "I am coming."

He began to cross the wall as he spoke; but, whether it was from the sudden jerk given to it by John's twisting his legs over, or from what cause never can be known, before Max could cross it, the whole wall fell with a crash and a cloud of dust and stones!

Max was for an instant supported by the rope, and struggled manfully to regain his footing amongst the stones. But it was only for a moment; the rope, overstrained by his weight and struggles, parted in two; and, after rolling some distance down the heap, he fell, where the descent became more abrupt, right over a distance of full twenty feet, followed by an avalanche of stones and dust that he had disturbed in his fall.

With a cry of excessive anguish, Hugh darted off to find some way by which he might follow his beloved brother. Nothing impeded him. He dashed over walls and chasms which, in a moment of less excitement and distress, he would have feared to look at, and in an incredibly short time succeeded in reaching the spot towards which Max had fallen.

At first he could see no signs of what he sought. "*He is* buried under the stones," he said aloud, in

his despair. "Oh, Max! Max! what shall I do? what shall I do?" he called aloud; but there was no answer. At last an object lying on the ground caught his eye. It was Max's cap. Then, with a little farther search, he found the senseless body of his brother, lying amidst a heap of ruins.

Hugh knelt by him, and spoke in loving words, but it was to a deaf ear. Then he carefully removed all the rubbish that had half covered the poor boy's form, and wiped the dust from his face with his handkerchief; and then, with much difficulty, he dragged him to a place less exposed to the chance of a fresh fall from above, and began to chafe his hands, and use what means he could for his recovery; but it was seemingly useless, for Max neither moved nor spoke.

Hugh put his hand on his heart. Yes! it beat, it certainly beat, though feebly; and, putting his ear to Max's mouth, he could perceive that he breathed.

Leaving him there, Hugh flew off to try if he could find any little pool or spring of water, for they were now on the ground floor of the castle, and it might be possible, he thought. But none could be found; and then, in all haste, though with much difficulty, he made his way back to Orwell, to tell him how he had found Max, and that he must return to him. He thought it possible, too, that John might have his little wine-flask that he had seen him use, about him, and that, if so, it might afford some relief for Max. John was sitting, in sad plight, on the ground, crying bitterly. He was in great anguish of body from the bruises he had received in his fall, *his foot* was dreadfully crushed and injured, and

his shoulder gave him severe pain; and he was also in terrible distress of mind.

It was some comfort to him to be able to give Hugh his little flask, which contained some wine, with which he quickly returned to his brother, leaving Orwell with a promise that he would come back to him again, if possible, before it became quite dark, and tell him how Max was. "It won't be very dark, though," he added, "that is one comfort, for the moon will soon be up, and the nights are very short. I would not leave you if I could help it, Jack; but you see I must go back to Max. Oh, if he should die! if he should die!" moaned out the poor boy, as he ran off to return to the object of his anxiety.

"And if he should, whose fault will it be?" said conscience—and as John heard the question, and could not deny that it would be, from beginning to end, *his* fault, he renewed his tears and lamentations. Perhaps, then, better feelings began to rise in his heart—feelings of thankfulness for his own preservation, of compunction for the sinful life he had led, of sorrow for the manner in which he had persecuted the generous boys who had now shown him such kindness. It might be so; for it is in times of suffering and pain that God's holy and loving Spirit often whispers words of awakening import to the soul, and instils thoughts that, under His farther gracious teaching, lead to repentance and amendment of heart and life.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TIME OF TRIAL FOR MANY.

WHEN Hugh got back to his brother, he thought that he had moved a little. Yes! certainly it was so, for the position in which he lay was a little altered. This cheered the poor boy, and his hopes greatly revived when, after he had poured a little of the wine into his mouth, Max looked up and tried to speak.

"Cheer up, Max, dear Max, try to cheer up—you are not very much hurt—are you Max? Do you think you have broken any bones? Oh, do try to speak to me—I am so frightened, Max," added he, bursting into tears; and then trying to conquer his distress, he poured a little more of the wine into his brother's lips, and renewed his endeavours to soothe and cheer him.

At last Max spoke, slowly and feebly, but with tolerably clear articulation; but he did not answer Hugh's questions, or even seem as if he had heard them. He said—

"God bless you, Hugh—good bye. Give my best love to them all—tell them that I am very happy—I should have liked to have seen them all before I die, but I am quite happy. I know Jesus Christ has died for me and saved me. Hugh, *do* learn to love Him; He is so good to me, and comforts me so now—*do*, dear Hugh." All this was uttered at intervals, and with much difficulty. *Then he said* again, "Good bye, my dear, dear Hugh,

tell my dear mother not to grieve for me too much." Then his voice ceased, and after a low moan or two, Max lay still, and Hugh thought he was dead.

In an instant he sprang from the ground on which he had been kneeling, and uttering a loud cry of terror and dismay, looked wildly round him; and then for the first time it occurred to him that as they were now on the ground floor of the ruins, he might possibly find means of escaping and seeking aid. In this, with considerable difficulty and with much loss of time, he succeeded, and then darted off on his way to the farm, shouting as he went, to draw the attention of any one who might be within hearing.

The farm-house door was open, and he rushed into the presence of the family, who were just seated at supper, and telling his tale in the best manner his anguish and fatigue would allow, he turned and rushed back to the side of his brother, whom he found still unconscious.

Poor Orwell's situation was, meanwhile, most pitiable. He lay there alone and in the dark, for night had now fallen, and the moon had not yet risen—his body in great suffering, and his mind in great distress; for conscience failed not, at that hour, to call his sins to remembrance, especially those he had committed that day against him who had so lately saved his life at the risk, perhaps at the expense of his own. He thought, too, what his eternal state would have been, had he fallen and been killed; and then, perhaps, for the first time in his life, a real prayer ascended to God from the heart of the forlorn boy. Passages of Scripture that he had heard in church and read in school exercises without heeding them, now rose to his mind; but they

were chiefly God's awful threatenings against sin—of the love of Jesus Christ, of Him who is the Sin-bearer, the Friend of Sinners—John knew nothing, and therefore fear took full possession of his soul.

He was also in severe bodily suffering, for his crushed foot and bruised frame prevented him from seeking relief in change of posture; and he was obliged to lie on the same spot as that on which he had thrown himself to avoid falling with the wall that had broken away, and the stones were cold and hard, and John was quite exhausted. Those who songht him out after Hugh had succeeded in obtaining help, found him in a state of distress and terror painful to behold. One of the farm servants, a kind-hearted elderly man, saw what trouble he was in, and kindly sat down beside him, promising not to leave him again alone. Soon John was able to rally, and his first thought was to inquire for Max.

"Well, sir, I can't rightly say," replied the man. "I be feared 'tis a bad job wi' he. If he bean't dead already, for which I can't be sure, 'tisn't likely he'll ever come round."

"And it was all my fault," said John; "if it had not been for me, it would not have happened! Oh, Max, Max;" and John burst into tears.

"Well, sir, I be main sorry for you," said the man, "if that's the case. 'Tis an awful thing to have another's blood on our heads. There, my dear young gentleman," he added soothingly, as he saw his extreme distress, "you know if 'tis a thing you've done wrong in, there's One that can pardon all, sir—*all*, sir. 'The blood of Jesus Christ *cleanseth us* from *all* sin;' so, sir, if it was by any

wickedness of yours that the poor young gentleman came to his end, you must go to Him in repentance, and humbly ask forgiveness, and He will be sure to hear; but if 'twas by an accident, and no harm meant, then you must not take on so, sir." Thus, in Christian wisdom and love, spoke the poor labourer; and John, as he continued to talk with him, felt that he would give all his boasted wealth, all his cleverness, for the peacefulness of heart that this poor man possessed.

Several of the farm servants, together with the good farmer and his wife, had now gathered round the seemingly lifeless body of poor Max. They tried to move him, and then found that he was not dead, for a low cry of anguish indicated that he was living, and that the movement caused great suffering. Mr. Norton, the farmer, had sent off a man on horseback, with orders to ride very fast into Otterford to Mr. Frere, and request him to bring a surgeon. This was his first act; and then telling the other men to follow him, bringing a hurdle or shutter to carry the poor boy on, if he found him in as bad a state as Hugh's report led him to fear, and taking some brandy and other restoratives with him, he proceeded to the spot where Max lay.

A good deal of time had been lost in clearing a way for the men to come in, as the door of the room into which he had fallen was choked up with rubbish; and the window by which Hugh had made his escape was too high from the ground for it to be possible to bring in the necessary things for rescuing the poor boys by that way.

Whilst then the men busied themselves in clearing away the mass of stones and rubbish that ob-

structed the doorway, Farmer Norton and his wife were busy in trying to ascertain what was Max's condition, and in what way they could best contrive to remove him to the farm. To do this, seemed to the good man an impossibility; for when they touched him, a low cry of anguish—the only token he gave that he yet lived—warned them to desist; and Mr. Norton therefore decided that it was better to wait until the arrival of the surgeon and Mr. Frere, before they made any further attempt.

Mr. and Mrs. Frere and their elder daughters, had been spending the evening with the Ellises, and were, therefore, not aware that Max and Hugh did not return home at the usual time. The Ellises' boys came in about nine, in great spirits, and gave them a merry account of the day's proceedings—seeming to have enjoyed it exceedingly.

"I suppose Max and Hugh came with you?" asked Mr. Frere.

"No, uncle, you know they went by water, and we by land in the morning; and so we exchanged on our return. I was his lieutenant, and took charge of the party, papa, and we had such fun," said Charlie. "I do not know anything about my cousins, for I did not see them for a good while before we started; but I dare say they are safe at home by this time."

It was, therefore, not until their return home at about half-past nine, that Mr. and Mrs. Frere, finding that the boys were even then not returned, became anxious; and Mr. Frere went out to see if he could learn any news about them. As he left his door, he met the master in whose house Orwell was boarded, coming to him to inquire if he knew *anything* of John, as he was also missing, and Mr.

Waverly thought he might be at Mr. Frere's. He stated that all the other boys of his house had been returned for more than half-an-hour, but that none of them had seen Orwell, or could give any account of him.

Mr. Frere then proceeded to Mr. Waverly's house, and saw Dacre, and two or three of the other elder lads who boarded there, and on questioning them, found that his sons had been seen by several of the party in the old castle scrambling about amongst the ruins, and that none of them remembered to have seen them since that time.

Of Orwell they knew nothing; but said that he had left a party of them in the turret, saying that he was then going down, a good while before they themselves left.

This intelligence of course, made both Mr. Frere and Mr. Waverly uneasy: and they agreed that the former should go home and impart this intelligence to his wife, whilst Mr. Waverly got a carriage and brought it to his door, and then both gentlemen intended to proceed together to Otterbourne in hope of either falling in with the missing boys on the road, or else of gathering some news of them at that place.

They had nearly reached their destination when Mr. Norton's man met them, telling them that two of the young gentlemen were badly hurt, and that they did not know whether the eldest was alive or dead.

Ordering the man to ride with all speed to the town, and request the immediate attendance of Dr. Scott, the two gentlemen hastened on to the ruins, where they were told that the accident had occurred, and *that they would* find the sufferers. The light and

bustle about the spot where poor Max lay at once directed them to the right place, and they arrived just in time to take the management of the removal of the two boys into their own hands.

They found the farmer and his men discussing the mode in which it would be possible to get John, who could not stand, from the high place on which he lay.

"Fetch a chair and a ladder, and bring some strong cords with you," said Mr. Waverly, leaving Max to his father's care, and occupying himself in the attempts to move John, who was, of course, the object of his especial anxiety.

This was done, and Mr. Waverly ascended the ladder to the place where he lay, and with the aid of the good man who had been remaining with the sufferer, hauled up the chair by means of a rope. They then placed John in it, and another man from below went up to meet and steady the chair with its helpless burden, whilst the two above guided its course, and so lowered it by the rope down the ladder to the ground. John was then borne off by two men to the farm.

The removal of Max proved to be a greater difficulty. He continued unconscious, but when touched his moans indicated so much suffering, that Mr. Frere concurred in the opinions of the farmer, that it was better not to attempt to remove him until Dr. Scott's arrival. He tried to persuade Hugh to go to the farm, and get some rest and refreshment after his time of trial and anxiety, and indeed the poor boy seemed to need it; but he so earnestly petitioned to be allowed to stay with Max, that his father consented and he remained. Some *hot tea*, and bread and butter, sent over by the

good woman from the farm, proved however, highly acceptable; and refreshed by it, and in some degree cheered by seeing that Max swallowed a few spoonfuls that were given to him, and opened his eyes for a moment, after having done so, Hugh lay down by his brother's side, to await the arrival of the carriage; and overcome by the exertions of mind and body that he had gone through in the course of the day, the wearied boy fell asleep on the heap of rubbish.

Mr. Frere sent to the farm for a blanket, which he threw lightly over both his sons—the sleeping, and the perhaps dying; and then dismissing the man, seated himself by them to watch, waiting in prayer on Him, in whom alone he trusted for help.

And the moon shone brightly down, and the shadows fell dark and clear, and a dead silence prevailed throughout the place.

It was a scene, that often in after days, was visible in thought to him who sat there; and often and often did he remember the consolation afforded him in the hour of uncertainty and dread. "Because Thou hast been my helper, therefore under the shadow of thy wing will I rejoice."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE messenger had made good speed, and Dr. Scott arrived at the scene of suffering as soon as it was possible. He carefully examined Max as he lay, and discovered that his right arm had sustained a serious compound fracture above the elbow. He feared, also, from the feebleness of his pulse, and the extreme state of exhaustion in which he found him, that he had sustained other injuries of some nature that he could not on the moment discover.

Aided by his skill, they contrived to raise Max, and lay him on some blankets and cushions placed on a shutter, in order to convey him to the farm where Dr. Scott said he must remain, as to take him to Ottenford in his present state, might prove most dangerous.

On moving him, it was found that he had been bleeding profusely, and lay quite in a pool of blood. This circumstance, that greatly terrified poor Hugh, who was now awake, and endeavouring to help by holding the light, was pronounced by Dr. Scott, as probably a very favourable one.

"Do not be alarmed by it, Mr. Frere," said he. "I suspect that he has received a cut from a sharp stone in his fall; and that this flow of blood accounts for the great exhaustion of the system, in a more hopeful manner than I had anticipated. *But it* must be stopped at once; and cutting away

the blood-stained dress, he discovered a wound under the knee, which still bled profusely. Then applying a compress of lint, and a tight bandage, he succeeded in staunching the blood, and was rewarded by soon seeing Max open his eyes and look around him.

He seemed surprised at what he saw, but Dr. Scott forbade his speaking; and giving him a little brandy, and addressing to him in a cheering tone words of encouragement, he bade the men proceed on their way.

Slowly, and with all care, the little procession moved on, Hugh holding fast by his father's hand; and they arrived at the farm without Max's having again relapsed into his state of unconsciousness. In a short time they had undressed him, and laid him on a comfortable bed, which Mrs. Norton had had prepared for him; and having swallowed a little nourishment, he soon fell into that deep and heavy sleep that so often succeeds extreme exhaustion.

Nothing could be done towards setting the arm, as from the length of time that had elapsed, swelling had come on.

Whilst Max slept, Dr. Scott attended to John Orwell, whom his assistant had already examined, and stated that he had received some bad bruises, beside the injury to his foot from being crushed by the stone. Dr. Scott, on examination, confirmed this report, and he was also led to feel some anxiety about him, from the excited state in which he found him. It was then decided, that as nothing more could just then be done for Max, it would be better for Dr. Scott to return to Otterford, taking John with him, and leaving his assistant at the farm.

He promised Mr. Frere to call at his house and tell Mrs. Frere what had happened, and that he would himself return early in the morning, bringing her with him. He directed that some strong soup should be prepared, and that and other support should be given to Max frequently through the night; and then having made arrangements for conveying John home in as easy a position as he could, he and Mr. Waverly set out for Otterford, taking Hugh with them. He had urgently entreated to be allowed to stay and share his father's watch, but Mr. Frere would not hear of his doing so. "You can be of no use here, my boy," he said; "go to your mother, and try to comfort her. Tell her from me, that I have good hope that God will spare your dear brother to us. She will be more frightened, Hugh, if she does not see either of her boys; and you must show yourself a man, and try to conquer your wishes, and show your love to me by cheerful obedience." Thus exhorted, Hugh, having stolen up stairs and taken one last look at his suffering brother, took leave of his father without another word of remonstrance.

On their arrival at Otterford, Dr. Scott at once proceeded on his mission to Merton Lodge, where, of course, the deepest anxiety prevailed. As hour after hour passed away after Mr. Frere's departure, and nothing was heard either of him or the boys, the poor mother's distress almost overwhelmed her. Both the elder girls shared her watch, and when about one o'clock a carriage was heard approaching, all three started up to listen. It stopped, and Rachel flew to the door and admitted Dr. Scott and his young companion.

Hugh had been charged to be cautious, and not

to say anything to alarm his mother too suddenly; but the very sight of him without his brother, together with the pallor of his countenance, and the burst of tears with which he threw himself into his mother's arms, at once showed her that something serious had happened, and Dr. Scott was obliged to tell her the exact state of the case. For the first moment she was so much overcome as nearly to faint; but she was not a woman to yield to her feelings, and after a few minutes she rose up, declaring herself quite ready to go to her husband and son, and insisted on doing so at once. She would not be persuaded to wait until the morning, but ordered that a carriage should be instantly procured; and entreating the Doctor to be at the farm as early as possible in the morning, she, with the help of the girls and of Nurse, got together some pillows, linen, and other things, that she thought might be useful, and in a very short time was on her way to Otterbourne, taking Lucy with her. Rachel had petitioned to go, but both could not, and, of course, Lucy had the preference.

Hugh, overwhelmed with grief and fatigue, then became Rachel's charge. Whilst she was preparing some tea and other refreshments for him, he gave her an account of the accident, and its causes, more in detail than Dr. Scott had been able to do, and then both retired to rest, with their hearts full of trouble, for Max was dearly beloved by all.

Whilst Dr. Scott went to Mrs. Frere, Mr. Waverly had taken John home, where he found his wife awaiting their arrival in much anxiety. With much suffering the poor boy was conveyed to his *room, and* with the aid of Mr. Waverly, and

one or two of the elder boys, he was undressed; but what was the astonishment of those who were helping him, and the dismay and annoyance of the patient, when, on turning back the bedclothes, a small dark head, with the body belonging to it, clothed in long white garments, was seen to be laid between the sheets, the head resting on John's pillow. In spite of the anxiety they felt, the boys could not resist a shout of laughing when Mr. Waverly exclaimed, "Why, what have we here?" and taking up the queer little object and unrobing it, he displayed to all a dead rat.

John but too well knew what it was, but how it came there neither he nor any one else could guess. All present denied any cognizance of the trick, and of course John did not say more than he could about it. But after he was laid in his bed, his busy thoughts ran back to the time when he had seen the animal last, and he now saw his misconduct in stealing his cousins' things in its true light. He felt that it had not been, as he had before persuaded himself, a mere practical joke, a thing common enough among boys, but it had been an act prompted by a desire to lower his cousins in the eyes of others, and to mar their pleasure; and that their adding the food thus obtained to their own stores, had been one of direct dishonesty. Then he began to think of other events of the day, his tripping up Max in the river, and all the other things that he had done, not only on that day, but for many weeks, to annoy and worry Max and Hugh. "And all for what?" he asked himself—and the answer his conscience gave in the hour of suffering was, "Because their standard is higher *than* yours. Because you are bad, and Max is

good." It was the truth, and John knew it to be so.

Some weeks passed before Max had sufficiently recovered to be able to be taken home. He had been very, very ill, and his life seemed at one time to be all but gone. But God had mercy on the poor parents, whose earnest prayers were ever directed to Him day and night, and at length the day came when Dr. Scott pronounced him out of danger, and after another week he was removed to his home.

A happy day it was when he once more found himself resting on the couch in his mother's morning room, and permitted to see all his sisters and brothers one at a time, and to feel what God had done for him in restoring him to them all.

Rachel had taken turns with Mrs. Frere in nursing her suffering brother. Lucy having gone back to school, soon after the accident, and in that sick room had she learnt many lessons, and now she hoped to practise them, and to be a greater comfort to her parents than she had ever before been.

Pen and Maggie had done their best during Rachel's absence to help Nurse in amusing, and even teaching Helen and Constance, and had themselves profited greatly by the efforts they had made to try and make papa comfortable when he was at home, and on no account give him for a moment vexation and anxiety. This they had been told was all they could do, and very earnestly had the little sisters striven to do their best. And now that Maggie knew how much her fretful temper and foolish fancies had grieved and worried all around her, she was determined to conquer them, and, *seeking* strength and help where alone it is to be

found, she succeeded wonderfully in doing so; and Pen, too, fought hard against her faults, for "she would not for the world add to such troubles as papa and mamma had to bear, or make mamma think that they were not to be trusted." And so the two little girls set each other lessons, and said them to each other, and Pen practised, and Maggie tried hard to do the bit of needlework that had been given her to learn on, as nicely as possible, and both were very proud and happy when papa came in from the office to dinner, and praised his two little companions, and said they were a comfort to him, and that mamma was so much comforted by Nurse's report of their conduct.

But now the time came that their own dear mother was again with them, and Max, dear Max, more loved and prized than ever, was at home again, and all began to take its usual course. There was a new and great delight in being permitted to sit with Max, and to run errands for him, and Maggie, for the first time, felt that she was of real use when Max—whose arm was not yet well enough to be used—begged that Maggie's couch might be brought in, and that she might sit near him, and help him in some arrangements he was making, and sometimes employed her to read to him, and set down his figures on a slate, when he wanted to make any calculations, for Max was too fond of his studies to like quite to give them up, even now that he had so fair an excuse for idleness. Then, for the first time, the little lame girl began to execute the office of nurse and helper to the sick, that in after days she found to be her chief vocation in life, the thing for which she was best fitted, and in which *she was* ever most successful.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION.

RACHEL had resumed her office of teacher, and Maggie carried out her resolution of going into school daily; but her mother could only allow it for one hour each day, so that she had much more time to be with her brother than Penly had, and dearly did the child rejoice in the privilege of being his "little eyes and hands," as he called her. Pen got the name of "little feet," for she ran all his errands, and was ever on the trot to see whether he did not want something fetched or carried—that is, at all times when not in school or learning her lessons.

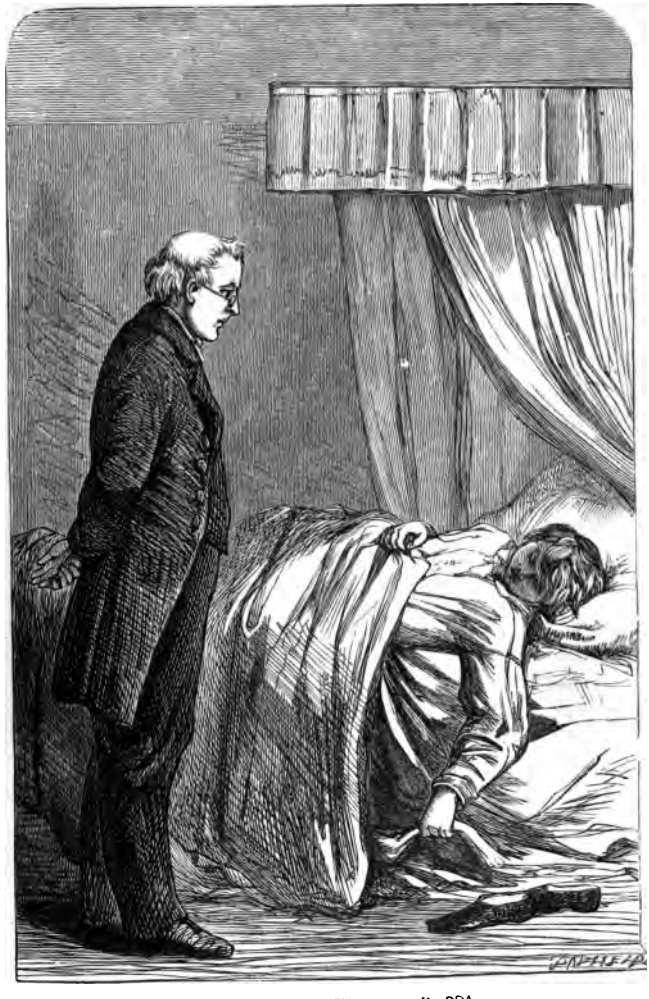
School matters went on much better than of old, for Rachel had become much softened of late, and though still a great deal too tempestuous, was much more bearable than she had been. Hugh's one delight was to be with Max; but he was not well: the late events had shaken him a good deal, and Mr. Frere kept him as much in the open air, and engaged in visits to country friends as he could, hoping thus to strengthen him. The holidays had long since begun, and neither of them who had been expected to win the prize of Max's form had obtained it. Both were too ill at the time even to know anything of what was going on, for John, probably in part from his long and painful exposure to the evening air, and the nervous distress occasioned by his solitary vigil in the ruin; and possibly, *in part*, from the uneasy and anxious state

of his mind, had been attacked by fever, and for some days his life was in imminent danger. Mr. and Mrs. Waverly nursed him with the most tender care, and such of his schoolfellows as were allowed access to him, showed him every kindness. Both his uncles also visited him, and his Aunt Ellis left no means untried to help and cheer the suffering boy; but nothing seemed to give John pleasure: he shrank from the visit of his uncles, and took little notice of those of his friends and former companions.

As the severity of his illness passed off, and Dr. Scott pronounced him, for the present, out of danger, much anxiety was felt about his ultimate health, for such was his depression of spirits that nothing seemed sufficient to rouse him. He took no interest in anything that was told him, preserved almost unbroken silence, and even when told of the school examination, and who had carried off the prize, he seemed to care but little about it.

He made no allusion to the loss of his promised holiday pleasures, nor even seemed to remember the gun on which his heart had so long been set; and when the uncle, at whose house he was to have spent the holidays, kindly came to see him, and tried to cheer him by the hope of a future partridge season, and an unconditional promise of the gun as soon as he was able to use it, John, though he thanked him for his kindness, was in no degree excited to interest in the subject, but rather seemed glad when his uncle's departure left him undisturbed to his solitary and evidently mournful thoughts.

"Something must be done, Mr. Frere," said Dr. Scott, one day after, and the boys had all left for the *holidays,* and Max had returned home. "I do not



John Orwell's Illness.—P. 201.

like the lad's moping, dull state. Can you suggest any remedy? We must get a change somehow or other."

Mr. and Mrs. Ellis and their family had gone to the seaside, and Mr. Frere suggested that John should join them. To this Dr. Scott objected, as the state of his foot forbad a journey.

"Then he must come to stay with us," said Mr. Frere. "I will send Hugh to his uncle and aunt, who have kindly invited him to join their party. I do not trust John Orwell, and Hugh is too young and too easily led for me to like to throw them too much together. But for Max I have no fear, and poor John is my dear sister's son, and must not be left uncared for."

"You've no cause to fear for Max," replied Dr. Scott. "He's one of a thousand! What a plucky little fellow he is to be sure," he added. "How he bore all the operations! I have seen men of four times his age who could not stand what he did without screaming. In all my practice I never met with a lad of his age like him."

"He has a secret, doctor, that helped him there, and will help him through every trial of life," said Mr. Frere. "Thanks be to God, my boy has found out where true strength is to be got, and help in *every* time of need; and he has found out also how to get hold of that strength. Max is a Christian, doctor; he is the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, the fountain of all strength and grace, and to Him he goes for all that he needs, on Him he waits, and never does he go or wait in vain. That is the secret of my boy's good conduct."

"Aye, and a blessed secret it is," replied Dr. Scott. "I rejoice to see him and my boys such

friends, and shall be thankful indeed, if David and Charlie get like secrets into their heads,"

Mr. Frere had a long conversation with John that morning. John had requested him to call, and asked to be left alone with his uncle.

In the afternoon of the day he came into Max's room, and sitting down by his couch he asked, suddenly—"Max, do you at all think that any of the boys knew you were left behind at the castle when they took away the ladder?"

Max coloured scarlet. He was still weak and the sudden question threw him off his guard and startled him.

"Yes, father," he replied, "I do think so."

"Who do you suspect? Any one in particular?"

Max was silent. After a moment's hesitation he said, "Do not ask me, papa. Please not to make me say what I think."

"What, more secrets, my boy? I thought you and I had done with mysteries," said Mr. Frere, looking a little anxiously at him.

"No, father, no, indeed," replied Max, earnestly. "I will tell you this moment, if you ask me, and wish it. My only reason for not doing so," he added, after a moment's thought, "is that it is not that I *suspect* who did it, I *know*; but I thought perhaps if I could speak to him, privately, and let him see that I meant kindly, and had quite forgiven him, by telling him that I had not named my knowledge of the fact even to you, it might win him to better thoughts. That was all, father; but if you think differently I will tell you at once."

"It is not necessary, my son," said Mr. Frere, much touched by the truly christian spirit in which *his boy* spoke, and had acted. "I know all about

it. I thank God your cousin has, by his own free will, and unasked, told me all. He has told me of all the evil thoughts he has entertained towards you and your brother for many weeks past, of his unkind words and actions, and of his conduct in going up the river, and in the ruins, and, indeed, I do believe that John is truly penitent. Max, he wants to see you, and ask your forgiveness in person. Will you see him?"

"Oh no, papa. Don't let him come. I would not like it," replied Max. "I mean, do not let him come to ask my pardon. Tell him, papa, that I forgave him long ago. When I lay in the ruins, as I then thought dying, I prayed that I might be able to forgive him all, and I did forgive him, and prayed for him, as I have ever since. Papa, I wish you would let him come, and stay here for the rest of the holidays? Would you mind? Would mamma mind the trouble of having two of us to nurse?"

"My dear boy," replied Mr. Frere, when his feelings would allow him to speak, "I thank God with all my heart that He enabled you to make so kind, and, under the circumstances, so generous a proposal. It is good of you, Max, but do you think you could see one, whose unkind and malicious tricks has so nearly cost you your life, without too much painful feeling for it to be desirable that he should come here?"

"Oh, papa," replied Max, eagerly, "I should not feel that at all. I pity poor John *very* much. You know, father, though he meant to play me and Hugh a trick—and, in truth, rather an ill-natured one—he never meant it to end in any real harm to us; and he has suffered so much himself. I should

so like him to come here, and to try to help and cheer him. You see, papa, he has been under great disadvantages; so far from his parents for so many years, and allowed so much money to spend as he liked; I think it has been a great injury to him.'

"I think so too, my boy," replied Mr. Frere; "John has never known the healthy influences of a happy English family life and home." Then Mr. Frere told Max that he had gone to Mr. Waverly's at John's request, and with the full purpose of asking him to come and spend the rest of the holidays at the Lodge; but that, when he found what was John's object in sending to him, and for the first time discovered that it had been through his deliberate unkindness that the boys had been exposed to the difficulties and dangers which they had encountered, he forbore from naming the subject, feeling that it must rest with Max to decide whether he could forgive him, and could receive such a boy as John had shown himself to be, as his daily companion."

"Oh, let him come, father; do let him come. But would it do for Hugh to be thrown so much with him?" he added, after a moment's hesitation.

"I thought of that, Max; and my plan was that your brother should join your aunt and uncle at Ilfracombe, and that John should have his bed. I really hope and believe that your poor cousin is truly penitent; he is much depressed in spirits, and Dr. Scott has some fear that he will never quite lose his lameness. Shall I arrange for him to come, then? You will not mind his sharing your room?"

"No, I shall like it. Do let him come soon."

"But how came you to know so certainly that he *had been* the cause of your being left behind in the

ruins? I asked Hugh that night—the night when it happened, I mean—and he said that you had at first thought it had been done on purpose, and that Orwell was at the bottom of the mischief; but that it had been proved not to be so by his being himself involved in the same difficulty, and that he therefore thought it must have been accidental, as he did not know any other boy likely to have played you such a trick."

"I know Hugh thinks it was an accident, papa; and I did not see any good to be gained by undeceiving him. But see here," he added, showing his father the scrap of paper that he had picked up; "I found this just as we first heard John's voice, and was reading it when Hugh called my attention to him. Then all the events that followed came on so quickly that I had no opportunity of mentioning it to Hugh. I found it in the pocket of the jacket I wore that day, which had been thrown aside in the hurry of undressing me, and the contents of the pockets not taken out."

"But whom do you suppose this was addressed to?" inquired Mr. Frere.

"To Tom Fulham; I saw John give him a slip of paper as he passed out of the turret chamber, saying that he was going out of the ruins; and it was Fulham that sent us off in search of an owl's nest—a couple of owls as we were to go," said Max, laughing at the remembrance of the scramble they had had, and the vain search for that which was not there. "It was that which kept us two away from the rest."

"John did not mention having had any accomplice," said Mr. Frere, "and I forgot at the moment to ask him how it had been managed; at least, I did ask *him*, and he evaded the question, and then

I forgot to ask again. Poor fellow! he was in such sorrow, and his confession seemed so full and true, that I thought more of comforting him than of satisfying my own curiosity."

"He would, of course, screen Fulham if he could," said Max, with a true school-boy's sense of honour. "You know, papa, he could not split on his accomplice, especially now Fulham is absent."

"I suppose not," replied Mr. Frere; "and it was not necessary for the freeing of his conscience, or for any other purpose, that he should do so. But I am truly glad that young gentleman is not to return here again. I suspect his companionship and example have been very bad for your cousin. I fear he is a very unprincipled youth."

"I fear so, father," replied Max. "Did Jack tell you about the hamper?"

"Yes; and about the agreeable bedfellow he found awaiting him when, in his sufferings, he began to get into his bed! He said that sight did more to bring back the remembrance of his misconduct than anything, and to make him recollect how ill he had used you, and how good you had been to him."

"What do you mean? who was this bedfellow, papa?" asked Max.

Mr. Frere then told him of the mysterious appearance of the rat between his sheets, the meaning of which none but the poor sufferer had known. "And how it came to be there is a mystery to this day," added Mr. Frere.

Max laughed heartily. "I know, father," he said, "at least I pretty well guess, who placed it there. *I saw* Dacre pick up the poor brute from the place *to which I*, in my wrath, had kicked it; and then

he took the cloth it had been wrapped in, and folding the beast in it, he laid it in a thicket. I said, 'What are you going to do with that, Ned?' but he only laughed, and made no answer. I do not doubt he put it there to show Orwell that he was suspected of being the author of the robbery," and again Max laughed at the bit of fun.

"It was a good trick, papa," he added, "because you know, Dacre, of course, could not guess that John would come home hurt and ill. I am sure he is too good-natured to have done it, if he had known how things would go; but if poor Jack had come home all right, and seen the beast in his bed, he would have known at once that he was found out, and yet would not have dared to say a word for fear of the story's getting about! I fancied he had some dodge in his head. He was the only one of Mr. Waverly's house that was with us.'

"You won't speak of it to Jack, papa? I mean not about Dacre."

"Never fear, my boy; we will both of us endeavour rather to be 'peace-makers' than 'peace-breakers;' Dacre meant no harm, and I will not betray him. And now, Max, I will go and settle this matter about John; we must both pray for him, and try to win him to be the servant of our Master. Thank God, that my boy and I are of one heart and one mind—may He bless you, my son."

Mr. Frere went on his way. A few minutes passed, and then the door flew open, and in rushed Hugh, wrathful and indignant; and forgetting all his usual care to be quiet—"Oh, Max," he exclaimed, throwing himself on the ground by his brother's couch, "it is a shame—they are going to *send me away*; and I do not want to go—beg them

not to, Max. You won't like me to go, I know you will not; and I would so much rather stay."

Max agreed that he should not like Hugh to go, and indeed it was true, for he knew that he would miss him sadly; but busied himself in setting before his brother the advantages which would accrue from their being separated for a time. "It won't be long, Hugh, because as soon as I am well enough, mamma says she shall go with me, and take Pen and Maggie with us, and all go together to Ilfracombe for a week or two; and then we shall soon meet, I hope. It will be good for poor John, you know, Hugh, to get a change; and we must not think only of ourselves."

"I don't care a bit about John," replied the impetuous boy. "If he is to send me away, and take my place with you, I shall dislike him more than ever, and it's a shame," he repeated, ending as he began. But Hugh had to submit; and the very next day the proposed changes were made, and John found himself established at Merton Lodge, whilst Hugh began to forget his indignation in the delights of a journey by train, and the prospect that Ilfracombe and the society of his cousins held out to him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MAX AND JOHN.

THE meeting between John Orwell and Max was in some degree painful to both; but *Mrs. Frere*, seeing that both boys were uncomfort-

able at the first interview, cut it as short as possible, and came and sat with them, working and chatting until she saw that they were getting used to the sight of each other, and beginning, in the freshness of youth to forget past troubles, and interest themselves with school details and general subjects; then she set them to play chess, and so contrived that no time was left for painful discussions on the first day. She saw both boys after they were in their beds, and whispered to each to forbear any talking for the sake of the other, and so the first awkwardness was got over. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Frere wished to check free discussion between the two boys, as they both knew that John would not be happy until he had talked over the past with Max, and assure himself that his cousin had really forgiven him; but they thought all such conversation had better be delayed until the first excitement of meeting had quite passed away.

The next morning John was asleep when Max awoke; and, as was his custom, first thanked God for the mercies of the night, and besought his blessing and guidance for the day, not forgetting to ask that blessing also for his cousin, and then took his Bible and began to read quietly to himself. The beds were so placed, that when John at last awoke he could not see Max, and from the quietness that prevailed, he thought he was still asleep.

Presently Max moved, and John heard the rustling of paper as he turned the leaf of his book.

"Are you awake, Max?" he asked. "I thought you were asleep. What are you doing?"

"I am reading," replied Max.

"What are you reading?" inquired John. "If *it's anything* amusing do read aloud."

"It is the Bible," replied Max.

"The Bible!" said John, in a tone of great surprise. "What, do you read that out of school, and of your own accord? Well, that is curious," he added, without waiting for his cousin's answer. "But read it aloud, Max. I should like to hear some of it. I wonder whether what the man said to me came out of the Bible?" and he began to repeat the text: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Max replied that it did, and turning to I John, he began to read, and John to listen attentively.

Whilst thus engaged, Nurse brought breakfast for both, and, placing their little tray on the table, busied herself in making both boys comfortable. She inquired kindly as to how each had slept, and receiving good accounts left them to enjoy their eggs and bread and butter.

"How good it is," said John. "I have not cared for my breakfast before for many a day. How kind it was of my uncle and aunt to let me come here." And then as soon as their meal was over, and Mrs. Frere had paid her morning visit, and herself removed their breakfast things, John entered on the subject of which his heart was full, and the two boys talked together of all that had occurred, until they had exhausted the subject.

"Max," said John, "do you think you should have run such risks to save me, if you had known that it was through me that you came to be left behind?"

"I *did* know it, John; I knew all about it before I even knew you were there," replied Max.

"*You knew?* You mean that you guessed it *was I that* did it," said John.

"No, I knew," and then Max told him of the note he had picked up, and that as he had seen John pass a note to Fulham when he left the turret, and as it was Fulham who had sent them after the owl's nest, he saw at once who they were that had planned and accomplished the trick.

"Well, Max, you *are* a good fellow," said John, admiringly. "*I* could not have done it, I know I should not."

"Don't talk such stuff, Jack," replied Max; "you would have done just the same, and so would every other big boy in the school. If there's one among us that would have seen a poor fellow suffering as you were, and not have helped him, he'd better not come near me, I can tell him."

"And I had called you coward!" said John, remorsefully.

"Yes," said Max; "but I am no coward, and you knew that when you said it, just as well as you know it now. I can tell you it required more courage to refuse to fight you before all the fellows, than it would to have stood up to the biggest boy in the school."

"I know it," said John. "I thought Hugh did not half like you to come to my help, Max," said John. "Of course he could not when he knew what I had done."

"Oh, that was because the poor fellow saw that it was dangerous, and was afraid for me. He did not know anything about it, and does not to this day," added Max.

"You don't mean that you did not tell him? Not even since when you have suffered so much," said John, much touched at his cousin's forbearance.

"*No, I* did not tell him, nor any one else," said

Max. "No one asked me till yesterday, and I thought, Jack, that some day I would tell you quietly that I knew, and then perhaps when you saw that I really did wish to be kind to you and quite forgave you, you would be sorry and do better. That was why I kept it secret, and I was *so* thankful when papa told me yesterday that you had made a clean breast and told him all about it of your own free will. Now, Jack," he added, "we have had it well out, and perhaps it was best that we should. And now I have a favour to ask you—will you grant it?"

"I'll do any thing in the world for you, Emp," replied John, enthusiastically. "There is not a thing I would not be glad to do."

"Then," said Max, laughing, "hold your tongue on this subject from this time forth. Never talk to me again about any of these past disagreeables. I want to be friends, Jack, and not always to have uncomfortable thoughts brought up! Promise now."

And John did promise, but from that day he conceived such an earnest love, coupled with such true respect for his cousin, that it became a guardian and shield to him, and the thought, "What will Max think? what will he say if he knows I did so and so?" became a restraining one to him, and helped him to refuse to do many a thing that in former times he would have done without thought or compunction, and thus Max's silent influence, combined with his bright example, proved a help and stay to John, until, at a later time, he had, by the teaching of God's Spirit, learnt a better mode of discerning good from evil *than any* human example could afford, and gained a *higher strength* to follow the good and reject the

evil than any thought of what Max would think, could supply.

John was so well pleased with the morning's reading, that it was repeated the next day. Then he asked to have his own Bible fetched from Mr. Waverley's, and having got it, he began to read by himself, if he woke before Max.

The time passed pleasantly on; both boys studied a very little each day, and the remaining hours were spent in all sorts of quiet pursuits—chess, chat, books, drawing, etc., with intervals of entire rest and quiet, which the state of the health of both enjoined. John could now move about a little with a crutch, and Max being strong enough to walk a little, they were much in the garden, sitting there or lying on the grass under the trees for hours of every fine day.

Rachel was often their companion, and the old friendship between her and Max grew and strengthened daily, and she was very kind and attentive to John, and often gave him her arm to help him about the garden, in which, with that help and his crutch, he now began to be able to walk a little.

The first day they reached the greenhouse his attention was drawn to Hugh's beautiful geranium, which still continued in lovely blossom. "What a beauty!" he exclaimed. "That's the prettiest plant in the greenhouse, Rachel."

"So it is, John," she replied; "and there is a pretty little story attached to it, and, as you are now one of the family, I may tell it to you."

She then proceeded to relate the little incident of Hugh's sentence not to spend any money for a *month, and the* mode he had taken of managing to

obtain that gift for his mother without disobeying her orders. She ended by saying, "Was not it nice of Hugh? I do not know exactly what he had done to make mamma lay that punishment on him, but I know it was something about lending money when she had told him he was not to do so. But I never knew the rights of the story exactly. Mamma says she values the plant above all the rest in the house, and will never let any one gather a blossom of it. The mark with the name 'The Lady Bianca' is one of Hugh's cutting. Has not he cut and marked it nicely?"

"When was it Hugh did this?" asked John.

"It was for mamma's birthday on the 4th of July," replied Rachel.

"Oh, dear! what a fellow I am," sighed poor John;—and then he told Rachel all about his misconduct in taking Hugh to the inn, and how he had forced him to lend him the money; and of the manner in which he had partly discovered Hugh's secret—though he owned it was, as Max suspected, more a guess than a discovery—and had teased and annoyed the poor boy about it. "I wonder more and more that Max should be so kind to me," he added; "but he is a glorious fellow. And poor Sir Hugo, too, he must be a good-hearted boy; for when I was so ill he came every day to see me for a month, and brought me fruits and things that I do believe he bought out of his own money. Oh, dear! what a bad fellow I have been!"

"Yes, that you have," replied Rachel, with her usual uncompromising truth; "but I think you will be a better boy now, John. You are right about Max," she continued, "he *is* a glorious fellow; *and Hugh*, darling old Hugh, is as good and kind-

hearted a boy as ever lived. Oh, John, if Max had died—and I believe he was very near it—I never could have borne it; I never, never *could* have spoken to you again."

"I almost wonder that you do as it is, Rachel," replied John, humbly; "I do not deserve such kindness as you all show me; but I will try hard to do better, I will indeed, Rachel." They had now reached Max's couch under the tree, and their conversation ceased.

As soon as Max was well enough, the plan of their removal to Ilfracombe was carried out, and John returned to Mr. Waverly's, not being allowed to take a journey. They did not return until late in the summer, and then an event occurred that made a material change in the household at Merton Lodge. A distant relative died, and left Mr. Frere some money. It was not a fortune, nor sufficient to make any change in their family plans or arrangements necessary, but it was enough just to enable Mr. and Mrs. Frere to carry out a plan that they had often spoken of as desirable if their income was sufficient to make it right for them to add to their expenses. It was now decided that Rachel should go to school for a couple of years; and greatly was she pleased with the prospect that lay before her. She felt the deficiencies in her education, and her enterprising spirit also longed for new scenes and a new course of life. She also now felt how inadequate she was to the task of teaching, how much she wanted to learn; for late events had made her more humble and thoughtful, and she told her mother that she hoped to be a very different girl, and a much greater help to her on her return *home than when* she left it.

Her place in the school-room was to be taken by an excellent daily governess, a lady in whom both Mrs. Frere and Mrs. Ellis had the highest confidence; and their cousin Emily was to be with them daily from ten till five, sharing their lessons with them. Emily—who, having no sisters, had wanted girls' companionship—was delighted with an arrangement that supplied that deficiency without involving any separation from her parents; and, of course the little Freres were equally well pleased with the new plan that had been formed for them. Max regretted Rachel's going, for his own sake; but he saw that it was for her good, so made up his mind to bear it.

Space will not allow us to carry on the memorials of our young friends farther, and we must therefore leave them here—only hoping that each and all of those whose histories have so far been laid before our readers may, by God's blessing, go on their way rejoicing, and remain or become the faithful soldiers and servants of Him who has Himself said, "HIM THAT COMETH TO ME I WILL IN NO WISE CAST OUT."

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